METRO / A19
Chin-Chin Gutierrez hospitalized for 2nd-degree burns after saving mother from burning house

ACROSS / A15
9 backpackers linked to rebels freed by court

BUSINESS / B1
Neda says economy to grow 5.7% in 2007

NEWS / A2
P3B sought for repair of classrooms damaged by series of typhoons

'Bush's Last Day' gifts a hit this holiday season

MANILA, CITY, MONtana—Some of the T-shirts bear only the date: 01.20.09. But other T-shirts spell it out: "Bush's Last Day."

But both T-shirts, along with an assortment of "Bush's Last

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Thursday, December 21, 2006 44 3 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 13 P18

BUSH: We're not winning, we're not losing. But there have been some very positive developments.

US not winning war in Iraq, Bush admits

But plans to increase size of military

WASHINGTON—President George W. Bush, who had contended that the United States was winning the war in Iraq, said for the first time that American forces were not winning there. He also said the military would be expanded to fight a long-term battle against terrorism.

Bush did not say so Tuesday the United States was losing the war, which began in March 2003 and has cost the lives of nearly 3,000 troops.

Instead, when asked during an interview with The Washington Post whether the war was being won, the president borrowed the phrasing of Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"You know, I think an interesting comment that General Pace uses is, 'We're not winning, we're not losing.' There's been some very positive developments. And you take a step back and look at progress in Iraq, you say well, it's

US NOT WINNING AS

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY
Twinkle lights hanging from trees, lampposts bursting with colorful lanterns, cars whizzing by in the Christmas rush. With lights up and blinking on Ayala Avenue in Makati City, Christmas is definitely just around the corner.

2nd petition on people's initiative readied

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr., Michael Lim Ubac and TJ Burgonio

ARRANGED STANDING BY PRESident Macapagal-Arroyo's declaration of her resolve to push Charter change (Cha-cha), the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (Ulap) is rushing to file a second petition with the Commission on Elections to amend the 1987 Constitution through a people's initiative.

Eastern Samar Gov. and Ulap spokesperson Ben Evardone said the second petition would be "simple and more appealing" to the public as it would push for a presidential-unicameral system instead of a parliamentary form of government. The first petition was dismissed by the Supreme Court less than two months ago.

Evardone said Ulap would convene on later than the first week of January to finalize the second petition, with an eye to gathering the mandatory signatures within a week.

"We're supposed to be tackling the matter now but with all these (holiday) parties going on, it's hard to get a quorum," he said in a phone interview.

"If ever, the plebiscite can be held simultaneously with the May 14 polls," he added.

At the House of Representa-

INQ PHOTO/RYAN LIM

RP, US sign 'agreement' on custody of Smith

By Christine O. Avendaño

MALACAÑANG IS HOPEFUL that the Court of Appeals will eventually decide to transfer custody of convicted rapist Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith to US authorities.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita yesterday said Solicitor General Antonio Eduardo Nachura had submitted to the appellate court an "agreement" between Manila and Washington manifesting their desire for the American Marine to be returned to US custody in keeping with provisions of the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement.

The manifestation was signed by Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo and US Ambassador Kristie Kenney.

"We are hoping that with the submission [of the agreement] affirming the provision of the VFA, we will get a favorable consideration from the [court]," Ermita told reporters at his weekly news conference.

Ermita also endorsed to reporters a statement made by Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago on her "tangkas" on the matter of Smith's custody.

According to Santiago, a staunch ally of President Macapagal-Arroyo, Smith should be re-

BY GI GIAC A3

Grade 2 dropout now 'The Master' in US

SERVILLANO "Billy" Macalino, top sign maker for Thomas-Swan Sign Co. in San Francisco, and some of his team's works on display.

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA—Servillano "Billy" Macalino calls himself "Pinay na mulgow sa Amerika na gumito ang trabaho la Filipino who wandered off to America doing this kind of job."

Although he describes himself in jest as "no read, no write," his American coworkers at the Thomas-Swan Sign Co. Inc. in this city call him "The Master."

That's because Macalino, who has been with the company for 22 years now, leads the team that executes designs for some of the most prominent signs in the United States and other parts of the globe. The 59-year-old also heads the "custom section" that handles repair.

Thomas-Swan, according to its website, boasts the following clients—Mahoney Owings and Merell, Vanderbyl Design, Prince Angeli, Redland Properties, Fisher Development, Grosvenor International, Bill Properties, Diamond Crow Residential, the San Francisco Fashion Center, the San Francisco Moscone Convention Center and other redevelopment projects for the cities of San Jose and San Rafael in California.

The firm, established in 1877,

GRADE 2 A4

PNP chief deploys elite force to Abra

By Alexis Pope

DIRECTOR GENERAL OSCAR Calderon of the Philippine National Police yesterday announced the formation of a task force and the deployment of an elite team in Abra to prevent an upsurge of violence following the murder of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr.

The PNP chief also said he was considering replacing policemen in the politically volatile province, particularly those identified with politicians.

Calderon said Task Force Abra, headed by Senior Supt. Eugene Martin, would assess the peace and order situation in the area in the run-up to the May 2007 elections. Martin is deputy chief for operations of the PNP Cordillera regional command.

"Task Force Abra is about security of Abra province from insurgents, criminality and all private armed groups," he said.

Calderon said the task force was still "validating the effectiveness" of the police in Abra to determine if there was a need to replace them with policemen from

PNP CHIEF A6

Strict enforcement of gun ban vowed

By Jerome Aning and Alexis Pope

AMID FEARS OF AN UPsurge of political violence, Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos yesterday announced that the Comelec would strictly implement the firearms ban during the coming election period.

"Only law enforcers such as the police as well as the military will be allowed to carry guns during the election period from Jan. 14 to June 13," Abalos told reporters.

"We won't even give exceptions to private bodyguards," he told reporters.

The Comelec will be stringent in enforcing the firearms ban and work not just for the filing of charges

ENFORCEMENT A6

Colonel puts relief work ahead of family

By Juan Escandor Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

LEGAZPI CITY—THE RESILIENCY of the Bicolanos has inspired Col. Roberto Morales, commander of Task Force Alpha (TFA), the rescue and retrieval team of the Army.

Amid so much death and destruction, the Bicolanos were able to pick up the pieces of their lives and were trying to make the best of an abnormal situation.

"When we arrived in Padang, I was amazed to see that the victims of Supertyphoon 'Reming' were helping each other. I met this foreigner who told me that in their country looting ensues after a disaster," Morales said.

Padang is a village in Legazpi City where whole neighborhoods were wiped out by volcanic deposits. At least 42 people died and 163 were missing after Reming left Albay.

The TFA, to be the government rescue and retrieval team that was able to penetrate isolated areas in Legazpi and the towns of Daraga and Sto. Domingo the morning after Reming.

Morales is not only doing his best for the Bicolanos, he has decided not to go home this Christmas.

"Considering what the typhoon victims are going through now, spending Christmas far from my family is no big deal to me. The Bicolanos inspire me to do my best—this is my way of sharing what I have," he told the Inquirer during an interview at the headquarters here.

When Mayon Volcano erupted in August, Morales had seen the

ALBAY A6

A2 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2006

WEATHER FORECAST

Second FRONTPAGE

P3B sought for repair of classrooms

By TJ Burgonio and Mike Ulas

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IS GIVING Congress a free hand to decide whether to realign the P4.7-billion fund for its food for school program to close the gaps in classrooms and teachers, but badly needs P3 billion to repair classrooms damaged by a series of typhoons.

A deadlock on the proper allocation of the fund led both the Senate and House to suspend indefinitely a bicameral conference committee meeting as next year's budget, dashing hopes for the approval of the P1,126 trillion 2007 budget before the weekend.

"Wala na (It's gone)," said Albay Rep. Joey Salceda as he confirmed that Malacañang was bracing for a truncated budget next year, after lastminute black-door negotiations bogged down.

Both chambers of Congress were set to adjourn last night for a month-long holiday break without ratifying the budget.

Failure to enact a national budget by Jan. 31 of the year will force the Palace to fund priority programs next year through the existing national budget.

So by Jan. 1, 2007, the Arroyo administration will spend per agate on a pulled-over budget of P987.34-billion, the same one spent in 2005 and 2006.

Salceda was in no mood to explain the implications of yet another stilled-over budget for next year.

"It's up to them," he said when asked if there was a chance the bicameral conference committee could finally agree on the budget.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus, who was just confirmed by the Commission on Appointments, said his department badly needed the money to repair classrooms.

The House wants the P4.7 billion retained as originally proposed by Malacañang, but the Senate insisted that there be realigned to build the construction of 8,000 more classrooms and the hiring of 8,000 additional teachers.

Lapus said the school feeding program were an essential in preventing hunger and poverty in the countryside should not be curtailed, but at the same time, acknowledged that the school building program was a top priority.

"I don't believe these two are mutually exclusive," he told reporters.

He said the department's immediate concern was repairing the classrooms damaged by the series of typhoons.

"If they can give me calamity funds for that, it's OK with me whatever they want to do with the school feeding program. If they don't give us those calamity funds, where will we get the repair money?" he said.

Classes of some 800,000 schoolchildren around the country have been disrupted when their classrooms were either damaged or destroyed by the typhoons.

Rep. 2007, the Depdld has asked for a budget of P124 billion, the bulk of which goes to the payment of salaries of teachers and personnel.

To break the deadlock, Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. proposed that both panels agree on a reasonable amount to fund the school feeding program in view of senators' fears this could be diverted for political purposes in the run-up to next year's elections.

The senators have suspicions that this might just be another source of easy money they want to do with the school feeding program. If they don't give us those calamity funds, where will we get the repair money?" he said.

Chamber

El Niño seen cause of warm Yule temperature

By Lawrence de Guzman
Inquirer Researcher

WONDERING WHY IT'S WARM when it's supposed to be cold? Blame it on El Niño.

"The unusual warm temperature these days is [caused by] cool El Niño phenomenon in the country. We expect it to last until the first quarter of 2007," said Dr. Bernardo Antiporda Jr., chief of the atmospheric, Geophysical and Space Sciences branch of the weather bureau Pagasa.

El Niño refers to an abnormal warming of sea temperatures that affect weather patterns, bringing drought in some regions of the Pacific and heavy rain in others.

In the latest El Niño update of the World Meteorological Organization, the sea temperature across the central and eastern equatorial Pacific has been observed as about 1 to 1.5 degrees Celsius warmer than usual since October.

This prompted Pagasa to issue an advisory early this month forecasting the return of generally warmer than normal air temperatures in most parts of the country.

In Luzon, the hottest predicted temperature of temperatures in the 30- to 32-degree Celsius over the lowlands and 16 to 22 degrees over the mountainous areas.

Baguio weather

In December 2003, a cold spell hit Baguio City when the mercury fell to 9.2 degrees Celsius, according to Pagasa. In December 2004 and 2005, the temperature fell to single-digit.

But this year, Pagasa predicts that the temperature in Baguio will hardly go below 14.4 degrees because of El Niño.

"Even without the chemtrails, the seasonally warm temperature has been very much felt these days," said Antiporda.

Jose Ponlaw of Bandaqua City complained that unlike in past holiday seasons, the temperature was even warm at night.

"It's as if it's not Christmas," he said adding that he had to keep the electric fan on to ensure sound sleep.

Also unlike previous holidays, most of the habitual attending this year's Misa de Gallo, the midnight dawn Masses, fled to avoid excessive sweat.

"It's not that cold. You'll see people in sleeveless shirts and shorts at the dawn Masses," said Noel Mendoza of Sampaloc, Manila.

Abnormal rainfall

Pagasa also attributes abnormally rainfall conditions to El Niño.

Last month, for example, 70 percent of the Philippines had become observed rainfall conditions, particularly over northeastern Luzon, Southern Luzon, Visayas and most parts of Mindanao.

But above-normal rainfall conditions were observed over western Luzon, the Bicol region, Mindoro, Palawan and Northern Mindanao, mostly because of several typhoons.

On Nov. 30, when Superphoon "Reming" lashed Bicol, Legaspi City in Albay also recorded 466 millimeters of rain—its highest in 40 years.

Pagasa said it couldn't the current phenomenon in the context of global warming, but has said that while more data had to be analyzed and verified, the climate had indeed become more unpredictable.

"We have observed that El Niño has become more frequent in the past years, and it's hard to discount global warming," said Antiporda.

"The thing is, climate is a long and slow phenomenon. To attribute it to effect the disease, a holistic and continental information to answer to withering our symptoms of gases and plunking more trees," he said.

Bright Christmas Day

But those areas experiencing rains will brighten up in time for Christmas Day, according to Nathaniel Cruz, chief of Pagasa's weather branch.

"The rains over the Bicol region and the Visayas will perhaps last until Sunday. By Friday, the low-pressure area [east of the Bicol region] will no longer be, and the frontal system shall have moved toward extreme northern Luzon," he said yesterday.

Cruz said the low-pressure area, the cold front and the northeasterly winds over the Luzon coasting the rains over Bicol and eastern Visayas.

He said other parts of Luzon, including the National Capital Region, and the Visayas that even experiencing the cool conditions would continue to enjoy good weather.

Fair conditions

Metro Manila will continue to have only another as the southeast monsoon brings little rain and this usually falls over the eastern seaboard, Cruz said.

By said Pagasa had come up with a 9-day weather outlook forecasting fair conditions for almost the entire archipelago starting Friday until Christmas Day.

"There is no weather disturbance that's threatening the Philippine area of responsibility. There is also no looming disaster in the equatorial Pacific area, so we don't expect any storm over Christmas," Cruz said.

A NILIM sits in front of the gates of the City Museum in Dagupan apparently entranced by the bright lights inside. Bangus-shaped decorations are hung inside the museum. MICHAEL PEÑAFLORIDA

Coast Guard braces for rush of passengers

By Lelah Sánovia

THE PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD has warned travelers going home for Christmas to expect a crush of passengers at the seaports this weekend.

PCG personnel have been placed under heightened alert for the influx of travelers, mostly students and workers, at the terminals.

Because of tight security procedures, passengers should check in two hours before their scheduled departure, said PCG spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Coyme.

Coyme also advised the travelers to secure their tickets before they go to the ports. Despite the annual Christmas rush, travelers still buy their tickets just before departure, causing confusion and chaos.

"As much as possible, they should be ready with everything. They need before going to the terminals to avoid inconveniences and to ensure that their trip would start smoothly," he said.

Passengers should also listen to announcements at the seaports as the condition would lead to the cancellation of their trips. The PCG usually gives out local advisories when storm warning signals are raised.

Knives and guns banned

Coyme said blades weapons, pointed knives, firearms and explosives were not allowed to be carried aboard ships.

"It would save them a lot of hassle if they will not front bring [together] them," he said.

He also reminded the agency's personnel as well as seaport operators and passengers to be vigilant against overloading.

"Though many people want to go home to their families and loved ones for Christmas, this should be no reason for them to cancel sea vessels and endanger people's lives, he said.

Coyme said PCG personnel and ship operators should see to it that vessels were only loaded within their capacity. Passengers should not insist on boarding sea vessels if boat are already filled to capacity, he said.

He said that while overloading was fueled by a problem of major ports where personnel of various maritime agencies were on hand to enforce the rules, the PCG was concerned about remote ports.

Coyme said these tertiary ports, which are used by small and light vessels, lacked basic infrastructure.

"There are usually motorboat ports that are hard to control. There are no facilities and no permanent maritime officers stationed there," he said.

Airport exec says noise makes Xmas livelier

By Nikko Dizon

THE AIRPORT AUTHORITY APpears cool to the idea of turning the country's premier airport into a "silent airport."

The airlines' new old proposal to minimize what they have described as "unnecessary noise" at the Ninoy Aquino International (and to put the ruckus in perspective, Robert Yu, head executive assistant of the airport authority, general manager, said yesterday.

"We've had informal talks. We're not saying we're not going to do it but down are business to consider," Uy said in a phone interview.

Uy said Filipino culture, as well as the layout of the Nia 1 itself, are among the primary considerations whether or not the silent airport concept is applicable at the terminal.

Uy noted that Filipinos are very emotive flying out are used to hearing their flights being announced.

Without the paging system, he said, a lot of passengers would be left behind.

Uy added that the silent airport concept does not appear suitable to the design of Nia 1.

"The terminal was built decades ago and was not designed to this concept. You could get lost finding your way to the gates," Uy said.

The official added that the silent airport concept could be more suitable for the Nia 3 which has a more passenger-friendly design.

Moreover, Uy said that Christmas without the paging is sounds is like wrong away from the Philippines or celebrating the holidays.

"Ang Christmas sa amin mismo ay ang ingay. (Christmas to us is very noisy)," he said.

In addition, Uy said the airport authority, the Airline Operators Council (AOC) had pointed out that flying could be stressful for several passengers, and that having a "silent airport" would help them not feel while waiting for their flights, or upon arriving.

Aside from the appeal to Christmas sounds, the Mass's holiday raffle promo is being announced three times per morning flight since this month, on top of the announcements of flight advisories, details, as well as lost baggage, and airport reminders, among others.

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo takes time out to greet policemen as part of her holiday routine. MALACAÑANG PHOTO

MEMBERS of urban poor groups display banner to welcome their Christmas messages. EDWARD DY

NUJP launches '20 steps to safety' campaign

THE NATIONAL UNION OF Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) on Tuesday launched its "20 Steps to Safety" campaign and the Media Guide on Safety (MEG) Response Unit at the Sewerpark Cafe in Quezon City. The simultaneous launchings were also held in Subic and Iloilo City.

"While they may seem overdosed, little already address very important issues that journalists should be concerned with—journalists' safety and accurate and effective reporting," NUJP chair Jose Torres Jr. said in a statement.

With the number of Filipino journalists being killed each year, safety training and awareness is a must to keep journalists safe and alive, the group said.

During the launch, the Media Safety Office of the NUJP and International Federation of Journalists presented the profiles and reporter's notebook that contains what it calls "20 Steps to Safety." "These are practical tips and information for journalists facing threats or covering sensitive issues or dangerous areas.

NUJP has recorded 84 media killings since 1986, 47 under the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo and 11 this year.

The reporters' notebook and poster are available at the IFJ-NUJP Media Safety Office. Local NUJP chapters may also be contacted for copies.

The Media Guide for RPU-MEG Reporting contains useful information for journalists that would help them in their coverage of HIV/AIDS cases and related issues.

Corrections

IN THE DEC. 10 ISSUE, Inside Trinidad's "Bare Feet" column, in "Golden Kids" the figure should be "Thailand, 12 golds, 9 silvers, 6 bronzes, 27 total" and not the number of medals that Thailand won at the 15th Asian Games in Doha. Thailand won a total of 129—not 12—gold medals.

IN THE DEC. 19 ISSUE, a front page story—"Noah Cho-cho push starts after Christmas"—misstated the name of Bishop Antonio Tobias. Tobias is the bishop of Novaliches—not Marcos. Novaliches is part of the diocese of Caloocan, which is headed by Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez.

Readers may send their requests for corrections of factual errors or omissions in the Daily Inquirer to newsroom@inquirer.com.ph. Only letters addressed to the Daily Inquirer Readers' Advocate (Attn: Ms. Sandy Prieto-Romualdez) and sent to the e-mail address readers@inquirer.com.ph will be considered.

Complaints about lack of fairness or objectivity may be sent to news.helpline@inquirer.com.ph or to the Readers' Advocate, Inquirer Center, 5th floor, 40 Chino Roces Ave., Makati City, telephone number 896-6000 local 3344.

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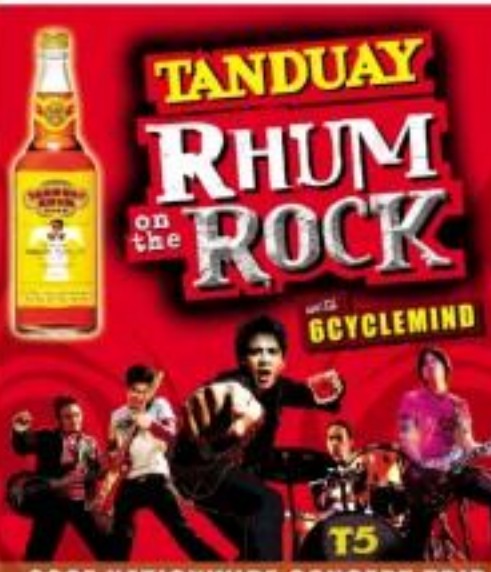

2007 NATIONWIDE CONCERT TRIP

Kick-off Concert: In front of Star City CCP Complex, Dec. 23, 2006

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HONDA

Colonel puts relief work ahead of family

first page A1

afternoon's firebrand. He was then the deputy commander of Task Force Bicol, and three farming happened.

Maybe they are so used to this kind of situation. They are making their lives, but they keep going back to their danger areas to gather their belongings and bring them to their families in the evacuation centers. They even manage to smile," the colonel said.

He said there were women evacuees inside the evacuation centers and many others sleeping on a living by doing odd jobs.

He sees dead people

Since Dec. 1, Morales has been a familiar face to many locals evacuated from the rubble. The deadly combination of floodwaters, volcanic sands and boulders had obliterated everything in its path.

He admitted that he was not bothered by the sight. What he found disturbing were the relatives of survivors who have lost their loved ones.

"I try only empathize and try to understand what they're going through," he said.

Big rocks

Morales said he would make sure the soldiers under his command would be rotated from receiving work just dead bodies) to other activities such as disaster response, road clearing and relief distribution. This would serve to lessen the trauma of handling hundreds of bodies, he said.

Sit days before Christmas, Morales said bodies were still being retrieved from volcanic deposits that extended from the slopes of Mayon when it erupted on Nov. 30.

Although the force of the TDOs operation had shifted to relief operations, he said requests from survivors of disaster victims would be accommodated whenever possible.

Sometimes, however, it was impossible to dig even with the help of heavy equipment because there just were too many volcanic rocks...the size of houses...covering the area.

MEMBERS of the PNP Mobile Group based in Ligao City in Albay carry a body one of hundreds recovered three days after Supertyphoon "Reming" hit Barangay Maipon in Guinobatan town.

Changed landscape

Morales said that as the eye of Typ. 30, when Reming finally left Albay the TDF tried to respond and prevent new areas exposed to lave inundation.

"The landscape on the northeastern part of Legazpi had totally changed while the town and business district way deep by floodwaters. It was impossible to send our men," he recalled.

Morales said the team was finally able to reach the isolated villages in the early morning of Dec. 1 and reached Padang by boat. Its members started extracting dead bodies from volcanic deposits as high as a one-story building.

He said local officials helped look for victims and where their houses used to be.

Caritas relief

Morales said the TDF also facilitated the opening of roads by bringing in heavy equipment and soundtracking with the Department of Public Works and Highways.

At present, the disaster response operations is more phasing with rehabilitation measures. The TDF is also going around the evacuation centers in Albay showing comedy films to victims of the disaster.

"We hope to give the victims a break from the horror of losing their loved ones. The volcanoes, who have shown a strong will to live, deserve to be treated once more," he recalled.

Caritas Philippines has also been providing relief assistance to victims of the Mayon eruption.

Caritas Philippines, together with people from Caritas Philippines, were set to assess rehabilitation efforts in the region.

Both agencies will continue providing victims with basic needs, such as food, potable water, medicines, clothing and shelter, according to the CBCP.

The office was on top of that of other Catholic agencies which had distributed around 500 bags of rice, the CBCP said. One diocesan office consulted help to around 14,000 families. With a report from Christine V. Zaguirre in Manila

Bishops help

Aid has been pouring into the

The United States Catholic Bishops Conference will disburse $500,000 ($24 million) through its humanitarian arm, the Catholic Relief Services, according to the Catholic Relief Services, according to the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.

CRS representatives, together with people from Caritas Philippines, were set to assess rehabilitation efforts in the region.

Both agencies will continue providing victims with basic needs, such as food, potable water, medicines, clothing and shelter, according to the CBCP.

The office was on top of that of other Catholic agencies which had distributed around 500 bags of rice, the CBCP said. One diocesan office consulted help to around 14,000 families. With a report from Christine V. Zaguirre in Manila

2nd petition on people's initiative readied

first page A1

tions, Majority Leader Prospero Nograles told the reporters that he and other administration allies would "use the interpass holiday season pass without even discussing Cha-cha."

He said reviving the debate on amending the Constitution to pave the way for the switch to the parliamentary system would be like counting chickens.

"It has divided our country already. But we still have that in January as our signals are getting mixed up now. Some of us are tuned in on the PM band, and the others are locked in on the AM band," Nograles said.

He said Filipinos, including House members and local government executives pushing Cha-cha, were not in the mood for yet another divisive political exercise during the holidays.

Lessons learned

Evasion said that despite the defeats in the Supreme Court, Diaz's belief in the urgency to amend the Constitution had not subsided. He said he would be even more straightforward by 90 to argue's constant call for Cha-cha whenever the needs.

He said that while Ubap wanted to forget the sting of its defeat in the Supreme Court, it is determined not to make the same mistakes.

"We've certainly learned our lessons from our first petition. That's why we are confident that we'll get the job done this time," he said.

Evasion said Ubap would now make a proposal earlier than past a question in gathering signatures to amount a people's initiative.

He said the new petition would be limited to only two proposed amendments (Articles 6 and the transitory provisions), compared to the multitude of provisions that the House had piled on in the first petition.

Evasion also claimed that the Supreme Court decision was not a total failure because it also validated the people's initiative as a legitimate mode to change the Constitution.

In the two decisions the supreme ruling on Oct. 25 and the denial of the motion for reconsideration on Nov. 21), the high court ruled that the initiative was a creature of the Constitution to exclusion of Article 17, Section 2, and that the petition contained more than one subject contrary to Section 10(a) of Republic Act No. 6735.

Doubly attractive

Evasion said Ubap's proposal to retain the presidential system would appease those not too keen on having parliamentarism decide who should lead the country.

"He learned that most people still want to have a direct hand in choosing their leader. I think this is what turned-off most of the public from our first petition," he said.

Evasion also said that by limiting the change strictly to Congress—from bicameral to unicameral—Ubap would gather more support from people who had grown weary of the legislative gridlock.

"We're making our petition doubly attractive to achieve our goals," he said.

But Senate leaders stood firm on their position that Cha-cha should be tackled after the May 2007 elections, and accused the administration of bribing parliamentarians to support the Senate-less constituent assembly (Con-ass) of the House in the Constitution people's initiative.

The senators, who had backed the House version of the Con-ass, said the leaders declared that they would only agree to tackling Charter amendments through a constitutional convention (Con-con) after the midterm elections.

Villar, however, expressed the belief that the President's fresh push for Cha-cha changed to oppose the proposition.

"She is saying that perhaps to embolden to the remaining supporters of Cha-cha," he told reporters at the session hall.

Villar voiced doubt that the Arroyo would vigorously push for Cha-cha at the risk of again building public outrage.

"She's aware that the public is outraged by this Cha-cha. And I don't think she will ignore this. The people's message was clear that we should drop Cha-cha and go ahead with the elections," he said.

Plum's the word

Malacañang yesterday clammed up on the issue.

Presidential Secretary Eduardo Ermita told reporters that he did not want to say anything more because the President had spoken on the matter.

"In order not to cause any complication or mixed signals, I would rather not make any statement," Ermita said.

He also declined to comment on the remark of Michael Defensor, the President's chief of staff, that pursuing Cha-cha before the midterm elections would be "courting disaster."

But there was no stopping Defensor from again airing his stand.

Interviewed over dzMM radio, Defensor said he preferred that the House of Senators up after the May polls so that a consensus on it could be made.

"We can still see the strong resistance of the people ... There is a need to explain it further to the people and educate them on it," he said.

Defensor reiterated that the role of the Cabinet was "not to push the President into a corner."

Asked whether Mr. Arroyo was being pushed by her allies to pursue Cha-cha, he said the "prayers for our country and our President" was that this would not happen: "Ang sabing dasal pare na sana hapat ay pare-parehong Pangulo, huwag naman sana."

Adverse reactions

The President's latest remarks on Cha-cha have generated adverse reactions in Negros Occidental.

Bacolod Bishop Vicente Navarra said Ms Arroyo should clarify by which means the Constitution would be changed because "I believe the sentiment of the people is definitely against the people's initiative and the Con-ass."

Navarra also said the importance of timing, saying that "if the President says he is constitutional convention, when does the wave it held?"

He said he would oppose Cha-cha through a constitutional convention if it is known it would schedule the election of delegates simultaneously with the May 2007 polls.

Rodolfo Alvarez, convenor of the Negroses United Against Con-ass, also roasted elected politicians for their support amending the Charter.

"Politicians should see reason with Cha-cha. Disregarding the sentiments of the majority will have serious repercussions," Alvarez said. He urged politicians to listen to the sentiments of the people they were supposed to serve.

In a text message, opposition Rep. Rolin Golez said Mr Arroyo never pitch for Cha-cha should not cause alarm in winning her office.

Self-destruction

"Sit in the opposition should not interrupt administration [efforts] while they are in the process of self-destruction. We should just watch in the sidelines as their crises almost [backstroke] themself game materials," he said.

Another House member called for a dialogue between government officials and Catholic Church leaders so they would work on the modifications for "whatever change" and tally the people toward genuine moral transformation...a reference to the bishops' call during the Church-led "watch and pray" rally in Quezon Memorial Circle in the Royal Park.

Bishop Navarra has also proposed the dialogue, saying the government-Church partnership in campaigning for moral transformation would be necessary and significant in obtaining public support.

"It would be an opportunity to prove that our leaders then government and the Church are united and sincere in pursuing moral regeneration," he said.

Navarra said a dialogue on the issue would help everyone come up with a "common framework" for character change.

"It is not enough that our bishops preach the character change. They should also join us in fulfilling this vision," he said. With reports from Christine V. Zaguirre, Delfin Mallari Jr. in Manila and Carla P. Gomez, Inquirer Visayas

Strict enforcement of gun ban vowed

first page A1

against the violence but also for the disqualification of the candidates who have violence to affiliate with, he said.

Abalos said that the murder of Atty. Luis Bersamin Jr. on September 2006 and the earlier shots thrown against Representative Pompeyo Pinganan and Bohol "Undas" (Nov. 1) should not necessarily mean that the May elections would be violent.

"The police have yet to determine if these cases are politically motivated so we should not just say that the new elections would be violent," he said.

Also, the murders and threats to lawmakers cannot justify proposals that politicians and their supporters should begin arming themselves, said Abalos.

"Such predictions for election related violence, for me, will only provoke and show political leaders and their supporters," he said.

Under election laws, the police would make the proper recommendations to Comelec whether a locality should be placed on a watch list or branded as a "hot spot" during the election period.

Security for lawmakers

The Constitution gives the Comelec wide powers to deputize any law enforcement group and order its arms when there are potential outbreaks of violence.

Close to 70 lawmakers had requested additional police security during threats to their lives even before the Bersamin slaying, said Senior Supt. Rosario Rilloraza, chief of the Philippine National Police Security and Protection Office (PSPO).

Rilloraza said around 60 congressmen and seven senators were provided protection by his office.

The lawmakers included Speaker Jose de Venecia and Senate President Manuel Villar, who Rilloraza said the PSP was obligated to protect under the law, Senators Miriam Defensor Santiago, Panfilo Lacson, Loren "Lol" Legarda and Gloria Macapagal.

Bersamin himself had requested additional police security around the murder saga.

"The threats to Chair's lives were validated by our intelligence group," Abalos told reporters.

He explained that the threats on the legislators emanated from their personal, business and political affairs.

'High-risk' politicians

Rilloraza said the number of additional police security assigned to the lawmakers would depend on the level of the threat they were facing.

If the threat to their lives is high-risk, additional police security could range from two to four, he said.

Rilloraza acknowledged that Bersamin had three PSPO policemen as bodyguards because he was considered a "high-risk politician."

But at the wedding of his niece at Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City on Saturday where he was killed, Bersamin apparently did not bring his PSPO staff, said Rilloraza.

He said that despite the murder of Bersamin, no lawmaker had asked for additional police security.

The PSPO has more than 2,000 policemen under the command of Rilloraza. He said the policemen had been given assignments ahead of the 2007 elections.

If he thinks the number is not enough, Rilloraza said he could ask for more men.

For local politicians, PNP regional officers are tasked with security in their territory.

Task force

PNP Director General Oscar Calderon also announced yesterday the creation of Task Force HOPE (Honour, Orderly, Peaceful Elections) in an attempt to minimize if not eliminate violence in next year's elections.

Calderon said the task force would be headed by Deputy Director General Antonio Rillera, deputy chief for operations. Director Rillera's assistant would be to coordinate the threat in the high-risk areas.

"I have directed regional directors to start applying for search warrants to raid homes of persons reportedly possessing loose firearms," Calderon said.

He added that policemen manning checkpoints would be strict and search motorcycle riders riding in tandem, a common modus operandi used in murders and political killings.

Ang Kapatiran

Also yesterday, Randy Pacheco, gun control advocate and secretary general of Ang Kapatiran political party, called for the immediate enactment of a total gun ban in public places, saying this would be "the best possible Christmas gift of the President and members of both houses of Congress to the Filipino people."

Pacheco said the gun ban law should include a stiff penalty for its violation—no lesser sentence than 12 to 20 years imprisonment with no pardon or parole. He said there should also be a ban on armed witnesses to court hearings, especially those involving public or private violence.

He said only police, military personnel and licensed private security guards in uniform and on duty should be allowed to carry guns in public places.

"There should be no more exceptions, otherwise, the gun ban will become a farce," said Pacheco, noting that the gun ban takes effect on Jan. 14 at the start of the May election period.

PNP chief deploys elite force to Abra

front page A1

other provinces. "The evaluation of the task force commander is ongoing," he said.

Policemen identified with political groups would be relieved. "We will put in new faces," Calderon said.

Calderon admitted that the PNP had not identified any "private armies" in the province "but we believe there are some armed men going around in cities and that is what we will address."

"Now that it's clear that the elections are coming, we expect that there will be private armed groups forming in the province of Ilocos," said Chief Supt. Raul Gonzales, Cordillera police commander.

Special Action Force

Calderon said he had deployed a platoon, numbering 50 to 58 men, from the elite Special Action Force to the province to enforce law and order.

Before the 2004 elections, the National Police Commission had ordered the suspension of the issuance of local police by local officials due to allegations policemen were being used for violence by politicians. This order has never been lifted since then.

Bersamin, 62, and his bodyguard, SPO1 Adolfo Ortega, were ambushed and killed outside St. Carmel Church in Quezon City at around 10:30 a.m. on September 2 as he was preparing to attend the wedding of his niece.

The other day, a lone gunman opened fire at the house of Mayor Albee Guzman of Dolores town in Aurora but no one was hurt, police said. Human later, guns at the house were fired from a passing car.

Local police, however, said the incidents were unrelated.

10-15 people detained

Director Arnie Semora of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group said they would detain 10 to 15 people were under investigation in connection with the Bersamin murder.

He said the group included witnesses and former soldiers.

Semora declined to give details but said they had been "good developments" in the investigation which covered other possible angles, including politics and the involvement of the communist New People's Army.

Speaker Jose de Venecia said on Tuesday that a 48-year-old former soldier had been arrested in connection with the murder and that he had information that the killer was a gun-for-hire given a down payment of P200,000.

Senate President Manuel Villar is putting up a P1.2-million reward for information leading to the arrest of the killer.

Christmas is a time for hopes and dreams to shine through. From November 22 to December 16, only about 8,000 MW of electricity was available to Luzon, 25% lower than what is usually available to consumers, because of its pipeline maintenance of the Malampaya gas project and the outage of certain power plants. Under the leadership of the First Gen Power Plants, the 1,000 MW Santa Rita, the 500 MW San Lorenzo, the 225 MW Bauang and the 112 MW Pantabangan/Masiway Hydro worked even harder to provide about a fourth of what you needed to make this season bright. Powering the progress of the Filipino is our way of wishing everyone a wonderful Christmas.

First Gen

US not winning war in Iraq, Bush admits

A newspaper A1

meeting—constitutional democracy in the heart of the Middle East, which is a remarkable development in itself," Bush said.

However, Bush also acknowledged the threat of sectarian violence, saying that part of the country's terror ties long that his administration has undertaken will deal with how to help the Iraqis provide for their own security.

"And I'll come forward with a plan that will enable us to achieve that objective," he said.

Two weeks before the November elections, which shifted control of Congress from the Republicans to the Democrats, Bush insisted that "absolutely no retreat is being" in Iraq.

Troop buildup

In other remarks during the Oval Office interview on Tuesday, Bush said he planned to increase the overall size of the US military, which has been stretched by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said he had asked his new defense chief, Robert Gates, to report back to him with a plan to increase ground troop levels.

Bush did not say how many troops might be added, but he said he agreed with officials in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill that the US military was stretched too thin to deal with demands of fighting terrorism.

"I'm inclined to believe that we do need to increase our troops—the Army, the Marines," Bush told the Post. "And I talked about that to Secretary Gates and he is going to spend some time looking at, you know, the budgeting, come back with a recommendation to me about how to proceed forward on this idea."

The White House said Bush's decision about expanding the size of the military was dependent upon his search for a new approach in the war in Iraq.

"This is necessary for the long term obligations in the war on terror," presidential spokesperson Tony Snow said.

Stark departure

Bush's comments marked a stark departure from the views of former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who was the Bush region for the last six years until he was replaced on Monday by Gates.

Rumsfeld had long resisted calls to increase the size of the military, arguing that its technology, like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, would find the Unit of States facing well-hidden terrorist groups and persistent local insurgencies.

Such conflicts would increasingly require ground troops, rather US ground forces to keep such operations going, they say.

Among the choices of senior saying it is time to bolster the military's size, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker and Marine Corps Gen. James T. Conway oppose the number of US troops beyond the military's authorized strength of 512,000, although he said no figure. He warned that the Army "will break" without more troops and a heavier use of reserves.

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell has also expressed support for increasing the size of the Army and Marines, saying Tuesday that there are "not enough troops in the kinds of sequence they're being asked to perform."

Bipartisan support

Congress would have to approve the money for an increase in the size of the military and there also has won support in recent months from many lawmakers of both parties.

Lawmakers would also find it attractive to boost the active duty force because that could relieve the reliance on local reservists, which have been relied on heavily for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Snow acknowledged that Bush was considering wording more acceptable to the Democrats after his top generals because of its questionable payoff and potential backlash.

Top generals have expressed concern that even temporarily skipping Democratic more troops would be largely ineffective in the absence of bold new political and economic steps, and that it would leave the Army and Marine Corps even thinner than the ranks ended.

New decision yet

They also worry that such a move feeds perception that the south and chaos reigning in today's military problems. In the general view, the problem is largely political, fueled by economic distress.

Bush said he had not yet made a decision about a new strategy for Iraq, which he is expected to announce next month. He said he was waiting for Gates to return from his expected trip to Iraq to get a firsthand look at the situation.

"I need to talk to him when he gets back," the president said. "I'm not sure we can announce it with the national security team, which will be consulting with other folks. And I'm going to take my time to make sure that the policy when it comes out, the American people will see that we have got a new way forward."

Bush said his decision to increase the size of the US military was in response not just to the war in Iraq but to the broader struggle against Islamic extremism around the globe.

"It is not a matter of whether that ideological war we're in is going to last for a while and that we're going to need a military that's capable of being able to sustain our efforts and to keep us achieve peace," he said.

Criticism

Democratic Sen. Edward M. Kennedy criticized any decision to send more troops to Iraq.

"Instead of changing course for the better, the president's plan for more troops will make matters worse in Iraq—to many generals agree," Kennedy said in a statement.

"We need a political solution that brings them wanting factions together and makes Iraq take responsibility for their own future."

AP

US PRESIDENT George W. Bush (left) is welcomed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates (center) while Vice President Dick Cheney during a ceremony at the Pentagon.

'Bush's Last Day' gifts a hit this . . .

Front page 3

Day" cups, mugs, bumper stickers, buttons and other collectibles, are raving among sales as politically minded US gift givers stock up for this holiday season.

One of the most popular items is a pewter-hued clock that counts down the minutes—until yes, minutes—left in President George W. Bush's final term in office.

"We're close to selling a million pieces of merchandise stuff. We're less than 100,000 pieces away," said Elliott Mackwelder, 36, of Arlington, Vermont, who started the business about 18 months ago out of the back of his fly fishing store.

Mackwelder said Bush's Last Day was inspired after seeing one of the unpopular president's many controversial policies ripened him to design a lapel button and then a bumper sticker that he shared with a few friends.

The campaign is aimed at expressing the disillusionment through more than 300 retailers from California to the nation's capital in Washington.

Business has picked up substantially since the merchandising boom, which showed Bush to be the lowest rated with a majority of Americans.

Diana Graham, of Overland Park, Kansas, who voted for George Bush in both 2000 and 2004, is one such customer, buying a Bush's Last Day hat last week as a gift for her mother.

"She despises Bush so much," Graham said. "We bet she—she is so looking forward to it."

REUTERS

RP, US sign 'agreement' on custody of Smith

A newspaper A1

turned to the custody of the US Embassy while appealing his conviction.

She said the VFA provides for US custody of accused American servicemen on "on the very basis, in a place that has been reached by mutual agreement of the two parties."

The three law justices have already resolved the agreement on the US Embassy premises as the venue of the detention of the accused. In typically, the accused should remain in detention in the US Embassy premises pursuant to the mutual agreement between the two governments," the source said.

Fighting

Smith, sentenced to up to 40 years in jail for raping a Filipina overseas worker, has been fighting for his release in US custody pending an appeal of his conviction.

Held at the Makati City Jail (MCJ) since his conviction on Dec. 4, Smith had just been denied his request for a temporary restraining order on his commitment order.

The Court of Appeals ruled that such relief was unnecessary because it had yet to weigh the merits of his petition against Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon's order placing him in the local jail.

Rightening why he was insisting Smith's plea for a result of US commitment to the city jail, Pozon had said the custody of the soldier by US military authorities was "premature and after the completion of the trial and conditions of [a] judgment of conviction."

Foreign Undersecretary Rafael Seguis yesterday said he had explained to his counterparts in the US Embassy that "they have to understand our system."

Asked if he had sensed any sign of impatience in his US counterparts, Seguis said: "It's normal that they become impatient."

"But we cannot rush this," he said. "There's nothing we can do but wait."

However, he added, "Nothing's too known and sure that we (the Philippine government) see doing all we can and that we have not abandoned that commitment. We are looking at it positively, that the rules will be resolved soon."

Turnover

If prison officials can have anything for Christmas, it would be for Smith to be moved out of the MCJ.

As the Makati would likely spend the holidays under Philippine custody with his latest legal defeat in the Court of Appeals, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology has decided to petition for his transfer to the Bureau of Corrections, or a prison chosen by an agreement between Philippine and US authorities.

Supt. Imelda Barretto, BJMP chairman for Metro Manila, said yesterday that the bureau, in MCJ administration, would file a manifestation to indicate that Smith be moved. "But Camp Bagong Diwa is where military issues are seen."

"We will submit exactly [what] we've written in the work out memorandum for the court to order his transfer to the proper facility per an agreement by Philippine and US authorities or to whom I have spoken with my legal officers and operation officers about it," Barretto told the Inquirer yesterday.

"We are always on lengthened alert because he always has visitors from the US Embassy, his lawyers. For us, he was sent to [the MCJ] for safekeeping only; he was not committed to us inmate. If we accept him as an inmate, we will be violating international law," Barretto said in a phone interview.

The official explained that Smith had been kept in separate quarters within the jail compound so being a convict, he would not be placed in the same cell as other inmates still being tried.

Smith is the only convict in the MCJ, a detention facility for crime suspects undergoing trial before Makati courts.

Over the weekend, Smith was transferred from the records' section to a better storage room within the compound, a smaller and more humid room still separate from other inmates.

No time limit

"We do not have a time limit for his stay. ... But as much as possible, we hope he would leave the jail as soon as possible," Barretto said.

The official said the BJMP would cite the following grounds for Smith's transfer in the manifestation:

- The MCJ does not have a facility for him "because the jail is not meant be a convict."
- Smith cannot be placed in a cell with detainees still under trial as "he will violate serious moral standards" in treating inmates.
- The MCJ is already overcrowded, and Smith's presence further divides the time and attention of jail guards, doing that. He is also being watched by a special and more than 600 detainees inside.

In sending Smith to the MCJ, Pozon had said the "temporary" commitment was in accordance with the VFA, as it would last only until Philippine and US authorities "shall have reached a binding agreement" on which Philippine facility Smith should serve his sentence.

Smith's lawyer Jose Justiniano had said diplomatic channels may be tapped to resolve the BJMP move to turn the soldier's transfer. With reports from Pia Gutierrez and Jaime C. Quiambao

Grade 2 dropout now 'The Master' in US

A newspaper A1

she makes signs for companies, such as San Francisco's Rincon Center, Ferry Building Expo display in New York City and Los Angeles, Levi Strauss & Co. (Dockers) Motors, McDonald's Corp., Gap, Old Navy, Banana Republic, JC Penney, Standard University and Bank of America, among others.

Four Masalon joined the company in a store he loves to tell.

Although he finished only Grade 2, Masalon finished his four months to other Thomas, a third-generation owner.

"Thomas came to work every day at 7 a.m. in my bed tub. I would be sweeping and never him. Tired Monday, Fri' for two weeks," he recalls.

By that time in 1973, Masalon, then 28, had been in San Francisco for three months. He came on the encouragement of a Filipino who had left odd jobs in a factory.

The incoming overseer paid off. When the owner needed a laborer to wash glass windows, Masalon was hired. He also cleaned the restrooms and threw out the garbage.

Because his English was poor, he asked fellow Filipinos in restaurants to write instructions from his employer.

Eager to learn

Masalon had big dreams and worked hard. He did not want to be stuck in menial jobs forever.

"I was eager to learn so I would be able to get promotions," he says.

Because of the language barrier, the workers could not speak Masalon. He easily joined them during breaks and in the few hours that he did, he feigned being able to understand their conversations.

"It was like that every day. They could not fire me because I worked hard," he says.

Masalon started at $2 an hour, a meager wage for someone existing his own family while supporting an siblings and his mother back in the Philippines. At the time, a dollar fetched P7.

Clear goals

"I was clear about my goal. I was going to do more. Learning any more, maximum to do. This long (One day one break will come. I just have to sacrifice. I remember days a week and 12 hours a day," he says.

Then a job offer in Alaska came in 1975. He told his boss he wanted to resign.

But Thomas did not want to let him go. The old man called in a senior worker who turned to opposition to regularize Masalon. His wage was increased to $6 an hour.

Masalon says he returned the favor by working hard and mentoring the many various jobs at the company.

"Galinggang naman para mag-ingat sa trabaho. Para hindi ka mawalan ng trabaho (It was hard to keep your job. I learned by observing, by learning the traditional and state-of-the-art techniques applied in the company said by experienced)," he says.

Hard life

Masalon believes he could handle the challenges because life in the Philippines had toughened him.

His father, a native of Ilocos, Tarlac, and his mother, a native of Bulacan, Pampanga, were landless.

The couple tried to eke out a living in Quezon City.

When his father got sick with emphysema in throat and lung ailment and his mother became unable to work, the eight children, including Masalon, sold cigarettes in Quiapo.

"I finished only Grade 2 because I went to school three days a week. The rest of the school days, I sold cigarettes. I developed my language because I had to make money," he says.

Although he grew up with thugs and mingled with leaders of Batang Sta. and Sigue-Sigue Ipatok gangs, he avoided a life of crime thanks to the constant guidance of his parents.

"They taught me to fear God," he says.

Elvis was here

To bring home more money, he collected cardboard and paper which he sold to junk shops. He also sold betel. When he was given snacks for the last two days, he gave them to his siblings.

In his early adult years, he worked as an actor for Premiere Productions.

In the movie "Walang Kaluwal," he played the younger brother of the late Fernando Poe Jr. He played second to a leading actor/film.

He joined a carnival and did Elvis Presley impersonations. This was where he met his wife.

"Nung ako sa binge (He used to be a fan of Elvis)," he says.

Masalon believes he has earned some degree of respect from those in the sign-making industry.

"When high-profile designers come around, they ask for me and consult me," he says.

Learning, sharing

Through the years, his outlook seem to items has not diminished, although he is nearing his retirement years. Excellence, he stresses, is a Thomas-Brown trademark.

"I go out and interact with other sign makers. At first, they are not receptive to me because I am a person of color. But once I tell them where I work and I start talking about techniques, they realize I am not pretending to be an expert. Few sign also recently in made (Before I die), I want to share my knowledge," he says.

He plans to retire after five years and return to the Philippines. He wants to teach signmanufacturing techniques or put up a small enterprise. Looking is his second-born child, he says.

Masalon credits his success to the following values: Love of family, hard work and dedication.

Military recommends 4-day truce with Reds

By Dona Pazzibugan

THE ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF YESterday recommended to President Macapagal-Arroyo a four-day suspension of military operations against communist rebels in observance of the Christmas season.

Gen. Hermogenes Esperon said his recommendation called for a halt to military operations against the communist New People's Army on Christmas Eve (Dec. 24), Christmas Day (Dec. 25), New Year's Eve (Dec. 31) and New Year's Day (Jan. 1).

"I have given my recommendation to the President," the AFP chief of staff told reporters, adding it was up to Ms. Arroyo to decide on it.

"That is a yearly tradition as a gesture for the Yuletide season. It will be a suspension of offensive military operations as a Yuletide gesture, but not connected to any peace negotiation," Esperon told reporters at Camp Aguinaldo. Two weeks ago, he ruled out a festive truce with NPA guerrillas.

Last year, Ms Arroyo declared a two-day Christmas truce from Dec. 24 to Dec. 25, but kept soldiers on full alert for possible attacks by NPA rebels who usually celebrate the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines on Dec. 26 with ambushes and attacks on military outposts.

Esperon, however, said the military would continue its offensives against Abu Sayyaf bandits and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists on the island of Jolo.

The enemy there will be no Christmas respite for 4,000 government troops who are hunting down bandits and members of the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah extremists groups on the island the last few months.

Since 1986, the military has observed a holiday ceasefire with communist and Moro rebels as the mainly Roman Catholic country celebrates one of the world's longest Yuletide seasons. The Christmas season usually starts from Misa de Gallo on Dec. 16 and ends on Jan. 5.

Fighting between the AFP and government forces has killed more than 40,000 people since the late 1960s. Peace talks stalled in 2004 after the United States and the European Union put the communist rebels on its blacklist of terror groups.

The government has suspended peace talks with the communists following the blacklisting of the National Democratic Front and the New People's Army as terrorist groups.

The government should push the resumption of peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines instead of implementing another campaign to crush communist insurgency through the Oplan Bantay Laya II, an official of a human rights group in Negros City said.

Cecilia Takanda, deputy secretary general of Cordillon Human Rights Alliance, said the extension of the government's anti-insurgency operations would mean more extrajudicial killings.

"The Oplan Bantay Laya II will wipe out entire guerrilla fronts, but we all know that the government is actually referring to legal [left-leaning] organizations because it does not make any distinction. The government wants to save face and wants it all eliminated," Takanda said.

She said the military's first Oplan Bantay Laya, a battle plan to stop communist rebels and terrorist groups in the country, was successful "in killing people, in creating fear."

"But it drove a growing opposition and outrage to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo," she said. With a report by Kristine Celina, Inquirer Northern Luzon and Reuters

WINNING LANTERN President Macapagal-Arroyo poses with City of San Fernando Mayor Oscar Rodriguez (left) in front of a giant lantern that won the Giant Lantern Festival held in the city. Behind them is Roland Quiambao, representative of Barangay San Felipe, which made the winning lantern. MALACAÑANG PHOTO

Councilor escapes ambush, but aide killed

CABANATUAN CITY —A Councilor in Gapan City was wounded while one of his aides was killed when at least five men fired at the official's car in Barangay Mangino in this city on Wednesday.

Supt. Ismel Santiago, Gapan police chief, said four other companions of Councilor Elpidio Banda, two of them policemen, were also wounded in the attack. Banda was taken to a hospital in this city, 21 km from Gapan, and was dismissed out of danger.

Santiago said Banda's civilian escort, Henry Mesanggat, was killed in the attack. His security escorts, PO2 Alejandro delos Santos and PO1 Ruhiran dela Cruz, the councilor's driver Noel Inocencio and security aide Eric Fernandez were injured by bullets.

Police said Banda and his companions came from the city market for an inspection and were on their way home to Barangay Sta. Cruz when they were attacked in front of the barangay hall of Mangino at about 8 a.m.

Santiago said the suspects, who were aboard a white Mitsubishi Adventure overtook Rizaldo Mitrabolid Belica van and blocked it. The suspects then fired at the councilor's van but they were forced to flee when Banda's group returned fire.

Santiago said investigators recovered at least 34 shells of M-16 armalite rifle bullets from the crime scene. Attached Reuters Inquirer Central Luzon

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Airport execs may ease ban on liquids, gels

By Nikko Dizon

THE MANILA INTERnational Airport Authority (MIAA) is amenable to the restoration—or even outright lifting—of the carriage of bulk gels and gel fuel for a banking agency official said the Office of Transportation Security (OTS) would have to study it first.

"There's a proposal to ease up on the ban. We don't mind lifting it, but the OTS will have the final say on it," Bobby Ely, executive assistant to the Manila International Airport, told the Inquirer.

In a phone interview, Ely explained that being "national in scope," the OTS would be in a better position to assess the security situation and determine if there was still a need for the ban being in "close coordination with the intelligence groups."

Ely declined to comment on the current security threat in the country.

While adjustments on the ban is "okay" with the airport authority for "passengers' convenience," Ely said security concerns would still be the main priority considerations in making a decision.

"We try to balance convenience and security, but the latter is always given more weight," he said.

A newer plan to blow up US-bound flights using liquid bombs uncovered by British authorities last August prompted international airports worldwide to impose the strict security measures.

As a result, international airports worldwide, including the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), prohibited all travelers from bringing liquids, gels and other items in liquid form in their hand carried bags.

Manila carried the security measure a step further by imposing the rule to domestic flights as well.

The US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) eased the rules on the liquid baseline September 20 as airlines restore airports in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

A K-9 unit from the PNP watches as passengers arrive at the Naia 3 terminal. Security at airport remains tight, but rules on liquids and gels may be eased. AP FILE

THE LAND speculation and buying that the P11-billion Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway spurred has threatened to displace 4ers-older Amelia Eabalero and his grandson, as well as 50 other families, in Floridablanca, Pampanga.

Aetas get back land, school in Pampanga

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

FLORIDABLANCA, PAMPANGA—LEVEN months pregnant with her eighth child, Jocelyn Pasole trekked back to Sitio Buyuran here on Tuesday.

By 2 p.m., she joined some 100 Aetas who had also returned, filling a school built in the middle of a basin-shaped terrain fashioned by a brook flowing from Mt. Pinatubo.

The ceremony, an ordinary assembly for them, underscored the importance of the gathering, though a decree, a prayer chant to the other's god.

"We've said our thanks to Apu Namalyari. We told our god we had a new life, that we will not leave our place, that we will never go

learn in the school of ours," David told guests.

"This day is important. Today we have returned to take back our school and our land," said their leader, Felipe Ajanay.

The 47 Aetas fallen in the year left their village in July when a land dispute turned violent. Five Aetas were beaten up by men hired to a family claiming ownership over 15 hectares in the ancestral abode, Ajanay said.

The conflict erupted amid massive land-buying along the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway being constructed east of the village.

To forestall the losses to crop from discussion Learning Systems Program, according to Betty Ahamad, village chief of Sitio Buyuran.

The school had been empty since then, said Ronny Mallabac, chair of the Development Action by Grassroots Learning Triangle) that expanded to Apung's request for a literacy program last year.

End to ignorance

No one was ever enrolled in formal education before the program started, Mallabac said.

Ahamad said the village council decided to spend portion of the development fund for the construction of the school because the Aetas deserve great interest in overcoming ignorance.

The school has a single room, measuring 12 meters by eight meters. Its roof is covered by green thatched grasses in the area while the floor is made of concrete. It has no walls or doors. There is a toilet at the back of the school.

"We first had to clear, reading and counting because earlier the Aetas as in human. We continued the lessons although the military, at first, considered mobile members in his schools. When the school was built and we were ready to use it, this conflict set back our efforts," Mallabac said.

Teacher Amelia Bonnaventure pioneered the Aetas program of Dangle and the Department of Education.

The nongovernmental organizations On Farm-Great Britain, Popular Education and People's Empowerment [Pope] and Education Network [Ined] came to help in module development and publication, teachers' training and school supplies for 15 children and 20 adults.

"Traders stopped cheating me when I learned to count my coin and yam, Pasole told the lessons.

Taking action

Apparently, Apung's tribe, the village council and their partners did not allow the education program to go to naught and the land dispute to continue during the campaign.

Mallabac said the campaign in the last five months saw them get the support of the town council that extended the bid of the claimant for the land.

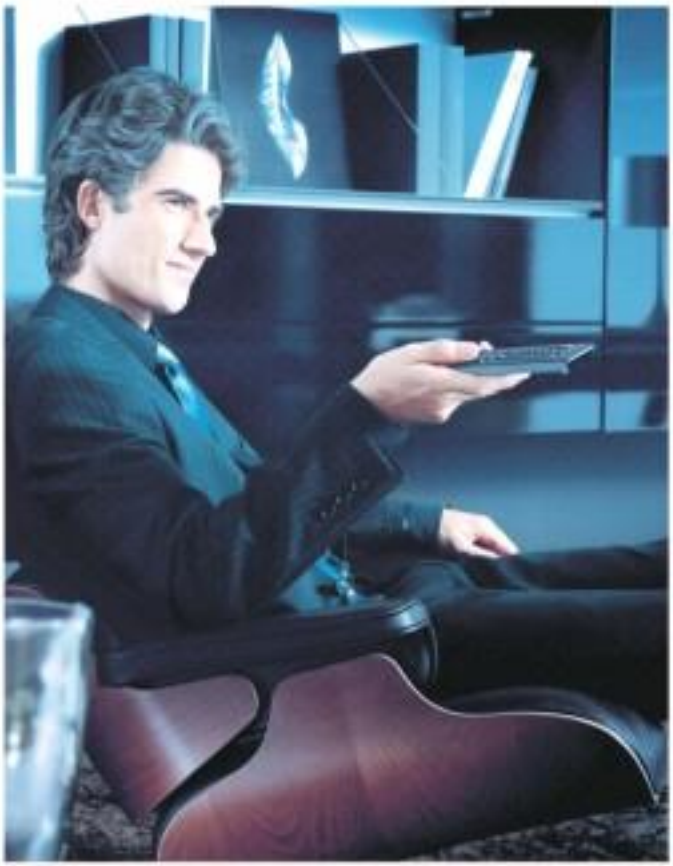
The Iglesia Philippines Union Mission of Seventh Day Adventists Inc., whose land title covers a two-hectare property on which the school stands, secured the right of the tribe to use the site.

Lubao Mayor Dennis Pineda helped convince the claimant to leave the Aetas in peace.

Atty. Pura of Dilan attended the program to affirm the importance of education in the tribe's survival.

"Education is a tool to defend your rights," she told the Aetas.

David Apung, Pampanga representative to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, said the tribe needed to file its ancestral domain claim to secure the land in the long run.



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THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, December 21, 2006
3rd Week of Advent
Peter Canisius

1st Reading: Song 2:8-14 (or Zep 3:14-18)

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

Mary rose and set out in a sense in the hills of Judah. She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with holy spirit, and giving a loud cry, said, "You are more blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! How is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me? The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby within me suddenly leapt for joy. Blessed are you who believed that the Lord's word would come true!"

Commentary

Our God is coming, the lover of the human race, coming quickly, soon, speaking to us and telling us that it is the time of spring, of birth, of feasting and giving birth [rapture]. Let us meet together and welcome God coming to us. "Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!" Let us hear your voice! Elizabeth hears Mary's voice and praising of possessed the Spirit it rather upon her and her child. So our greetings call forth the Spirit upon those who have our voices! Do we, with Mary, trust the Word of God spoken to us and act upon it, making it come true?

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Bicol agri loses P2.6B due to typhoons

PILI, CAMARINES SUR—TYPHOONS "Reming" and "Seniang" destroyed P2.6 billion worth of crops and agricultural infrastructure in Bicol, according to a final damage report of the Department of Agriculture.

At least 974,598 farming families lost their means of livelihood to the two successive typhoons that ravaged Bicol, a week apart.

The two typhoons also decreased the sufficiency level for vegetables here from 92.2 percent before the typhoons to 26.9 percent after they ravaged Bicol.

The report recorded damage of about P1.2 billion worth of agricultural infrastructure that included aquaculture, irrigation and post-harvest facilities.

The coconut industry lost the most losses with more than P950-million worth of production while pests destroyed whole cherry-of-the crops that included sugarcane followed with about P343-million worth of losses.

Except for corn production with losses at about P45-million, all other agricultural crops recorded hundreds of millions in estimated damages.

The two typhoons also destroyed 29,561 hectares of always plantations all over Bicol, destroying at least 92267 and 1ion trees of crops.

For rice production, some 70,298 metric tons with an estimated value of P1.14 billion, from the total number of hectares planted this season, have been destroyed—directly and indirectly—affecting some 23,000 farm families.

Losses in livestock and fisheries was placed at P1.37 million and P138 million, respectively.

Also included in the final damage report of the DA were the more than P1 million worth of fish stocks in the Bulusan Pond and Sorsogon Bay. Joan Bantolino Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon

CA denies Michael Ray bid to drop slay case

By Armand N. Nocum

THE COURT OF APPEALS (CA) denied former comic officer Michael Ray Aquino's petition seeking to restrain the Manila regional trial court from proceeding with his trial in connection with the murder of public relations man Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emesterio Gerilla in November 2000.

In a resolution promulgated by Associate Justice Edgardo Sundiam, the CA dismissed outright the petition for the issuance of a temporary restraining order filed by Aquino's lawyers Reynol Lunes, for various legal defects.

"Wherefore, in view of the foregoing legal defects, the instant petition is hereby denied due course and is dismissed outright," the CA said in a one-page resolution.

In his petition, Aquino named Judge Ma's Garcia Fernandez of the Manila RTC branch 18, Senior State Prosecutor Philip Ellen, State Prosecutor Hazel Decena-Sadang, prosecutors Jasper Benedict Medina and Assistant Provincial Prosecutor Carlito Layug as respondents.

The court cited, among others, Lunes's failure to show that he was duly authorized by his client to sign the petition for and on behalf of the petitioner.

"It is settled that the requirement in the rules that the certification of non-forum shopping should be executed and signed by the plaintiff or the principal means that counsel cannot sign said certification unless clothed with special authority to do so...," the CA said.

The appellate court said that the would-be-party that the plaintiff knows better than anyone else whether a petition has previously been filed involving the same case or substantially the same issues.

"Hence a certification signed by counsel alone is defective and constitutes a valid cause for the dismissal of the petition," the CA said.

Aquino earlier asked the Manila court to suspend trial pronouncing so that he could avail of a preliminary investigation.

The Manila court said a preliminary investigation can be conducted "at any time (with one party's) if the respondent cannot be subpoenaed or does not appear after due notice.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

OPINION

Killing season

EDITORIAL

IF IT IS ANY CONSOLATION TO THE RELATIVES of the late Aloya Rep. Leo Bersamin, his assassination seems destined to become the exception to this country where getting away with murder has become the rule. After standing as sponsor in the wedding of his niece, Bersamin, together with one of his bodyguards, was shot to death Saturday in the churchyard of Mt. Carmel Church. Speaker Jose de Venecia said that as of Tuesday, the police had arrested a former soldier and recovered a pistol believed to have been used in Bersamin's murder. He went on to say that the hired killer received from the mastermind an initial P200,000 for the hit. All this information came from Director General Oscar Calderon of the Philippine National Police, De Venecia said.

If the Speaker and the PNP chief are correct, then the solution of the case is near at hand. For if the police have already uncovered such details as the amount paid in advance, then the names of everyone involved should be just a matter of time. Where that happens, a new speed record of sorts in the solution of killings will be set. Then Bersamin might get the kind of justice that has so far eluded the likes of Nida Blanca and former lawmakers like Representative Henry Lanot, Former Senators and Marcial Pozorales, and former Sen. Benigno S. Aquino Jr.

This is what makes the situation so scary for ordinary people: that so many high-profile murders cannot be solved despite intense public pressure and the equally strong assurances of authorities that they would seek out the killers and bring them to justice. It is one an irritant but, but one that is justified by experience. Just consider the scores of journalists killed during the past six years under the Arroyo administration, most of them still unsolved; and the hundreds of leftist activists gunned down by death squads, with the authorities hardly lifting a finger to find out who are behind them.

Now this culture of impunity that has engulfed the Filipino masses has begun to creep toward the circle of power. And if some good has resulted from it, it is forcing those in positions of power to demand action from the authorities.

After Bersamin's murder, many of his colleagues took the PNP to task for its failure to stop violence and crime. "Habitat criminal elements are running amuck," Rep. Rodolfo Albano said in a privilege speech. "Criminals go about their business with impunity. It is as if they know that they are beyond the reach of the law, and the law enforcers are inutile at bringing them to justice." Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. warned that unless the police can speed up the solution of crimes and the guilty are punished swiftly, it will remain "open season for criminal activities." Sen. Richard Gordon urged the Senate "to roll out law enforcement agencies to fight back."

Lawmakers also proposed several measures to help stem the violence and the killings. Albano called for more policemen to be trained to fight crime, saying that if the government can train thousands of policemen to control demonstrations, "certainly the police can train and deploy an extra manpower in preventing crime and catching criminals." He also said that policemen assigned as security for lawmakers should now be pulled out and assigned to fight crime in the streets. "It is criminal to take away from the police manpower they dearly need to perform their functions adequately," he said.

These are all sensible suggestions, but nobody seemed to have heard Albano. Police officials say as many as 67 lawmakers have been assigned police bodyguards supposedly because of threats to their lives, and apparently no one is willing to let go of them. They all seem to have missed one small detail released to Bersamin's assassin: he had bodyguards, but he got killed anyway regardless with one of them. They all seem to ignore the unnerving possibility that if those bodyguards were out there in the churchyard looking out for gun-toting criminals, they just might have caught the assassin before they could fire a single shot. They cannot understand why Randy Pichaco has been preaching all these years that only policemen ought to be armed and everybody else has no business carrying a gun.

And that is one big reason we have the killing season all year-round.

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'Scrooge Is Here'

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

AFTER THE CHRISTMAS DAWN BELL THE beggar flagged down the well-to-do walker. "My loved one is in the city hospital," she lisped. "Friend" turned a panjan the wife had shared odds and ends; a spare blanket; some shoes; another child a few years. Soon, the coin was gone. "And we didn't even get her name," the beneficiary told me.

Like Lazarus at the rich man's gate, the woman blended into the woodwork: scrawny, diffident, burnt from begging in the sun. She was just one of the many living lives by its wits: jeepney drops, schools—wherever the better off pass by.

One shower's 100 Filipinos, 36 overseas before income: 47,000 a day, the United Nation Development Programme's "Human Development Report 2006" reveals. Inside Quezon City, some swamp or shabby dotted enclaves, in some corners, the "bottle-up brigade" of grimy kids which flattened tin cans tucked in slabs, in accompany off key carols and nudge a pins or two.

They'll feed at statistics. In Negros Oriental, for example, the richest 10 percent earn some 37 runaways. Counter that with fact that the poorest 10 percent make do with just over two runaways—rounds really, like those time figures we used for as they spilled from the sick man's daily basted. The basis does not quite match the scenes in Hotel Rwanda.

In this country, no one dies directly from starvation. Writing in Pathways Bulletin, a Grade 1 teacher said she hesitates to ask her child always crouched below his desk during breaks. "She didn't want us to see her eat breakfast—green papaya, cooked in salt and vinegar, or sipped in a plastic bag. "This is one reason to visit to children."

And the resulting malnutrition opens the floodgates to debilitating diseases from tuberculosis, blindness due to lesions a deficiency. 111 persons in Western Mindanao's 10 summits (47 percent poorest in Eastern Visayas), the 5th and 6th nutrition survey found—until Congress slashed the study budget.

Today, the logic cycle of ill-fed, vulnerable mothers giving birth to stressed children—who in turn bear stunted the next generation of stressed infants—is a reality the State Development Bank has noted. Singaporeans. That is Quezon Link, are not miserable class out bottle-up brigade situations, notwithstanding the International Isolated and Multi-cost doomed results for Filipino students. But they've better accumulated experience adequately tutored, precisely what their bodies and brains are developing.

"Many of the things are saved can result." Rebel Lancaster Gabriel Marcial notes. "The child cannot wait. Now is the time his brains are being formed, the blood made, his nerves developed. To him, we cannot say tomorrow. Whatever is today."

"HDR, or protein energy malnutrition, takes a bigger proportion of Filipino pre-school children to premature growth than in poorer Bangladesh, Report Editions." the World Bank and United Development Bank have observed.

Decreasing hunger will not yield to wishing constellations by extending terms of office for congressmen. It needs "planning," for example, to ensure that the "20% Development Fund" monies overseas to assist basic human needs, rather than a mere pork barrel for local governments.

The need is for carefully thought-out programs and political will to meet basic human needs. Our last literal probably had referendum. But they could tell more than the HDR's abstract figures do: 40.6 percent of 15,000 Filipinos have TB,—compared to 133 for Malaysians.

That scrooge turns from a lethal condition of poverty, threats hunger, poor nutrition and dirty water, deny our "friend didn't need nutrition to explain truncated life spans—seen in infant coffins—as chaos where the bird stirred. The lives of the poor are often "nasty, brutish and short."

"The best answer to lack of nutrition are ill-fit, replenished in the huge gulf in life's chances, in truth," the HDR 2006 notes. Brazil's bold one-time fix to 5 percent of total wages per. But in all regions, institution prevention has been behind funded projects to model. "And there is no evidence that the gap is narrowing."

"The view that poor people have access to plentiful supplies of cheap water is illusory," HDR 2006 cautions. "Many are already paying far more than their tap officials expect their basic needs." It needs to widen the circle of those who have access to water and confidence. Best powers "Have getting reflects a simple persuasive principle the poorer you are, the more you pay."

There is plenty of scope for just measures from high-income households—those who keep their home green and their swimming pools sparkling. Just this dent does not apply to those who scrimp before parents fate. Where bills from families or standpipe operators can exceed local 5 percent of household incomes as Abuja's to 22 percent in Ilorin.

A study of 15 countries shows that access to safe water can increase by about 8 years. Reduce infant mortality by 21 percent. Installation of a flush toilet can double years by 10 percent in Peru. And some related diseases cost the "equivalent of an entire school year for all 7-year-old children in Ethiopia."

The problem that leaps out from all these mounting disasters are preventable. But those of us, blessed with education, skills and position, must feel "taste up that up beach freely." Only then, will we discover—as Jonathan Swift's satire in "Scrooge to Host"—they're "hard as flint, from which, as hard one ever struck generous fire, sweet land will entwined, and villany is an error."

* * *

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Believe it or not

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

BELIEVE IT OR NOT THAT'S THE TITLE one of the books. My how a situation today that knocks at the door of Ripley's "Believe It Or Not." That situation is Come Jennery now over Gloria Macapagal Arroyo will be the longest-serving president in this country since 1986.

GMA will have occupied Malacañang longer than Cory Aquino, the Filipino leader who was loved most from empower, at least by the elite and middle class said by the foreign community, until her rule were on. But naturally. Watching the ultimate against her, which included 15 coup attempts and the end of her term in reality on the issues of corruption and human rights violations, anti-communist cults, paramilitary groups, she could have gotten a second term if she wanted it. Kasimi Bing in the economy to be the best-ever in the country, and there was a strong cardinal claims for her. It is to her eye-watering credit that she willingly stepped down, thereby ending, as she began, on a high moral note.

GMA will have occupied Malacañang longer than Fidel Ramos, the president who oversaw the salad days of post-Edsa Philippine economy. Much of it of course was by luck, though he or his congressmen made it out to be his genius. It was the benefit of Triumphant Capitalism after the fall of the communist world, gang-up spike from by the way toward fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Philippines was caught up in the economic boom that rippled across the world in the early and the mid-'90s. Financial crises were a strong cardinal claims for her. It is to her eye-watering credit that she willingly stepped down, thereby ending, as she began, on a high moral note.

And GMA will have occupied Malacañang longer than Joseph Estrada, arguably the most popular president this country ever had. Probably since Ninoy Aquino. Many of not counting the votes at all. As the Hacienda could never have beaten Erap—in overwhelming win he had. Indeed short of not letting elections (at least at all. As the 57 can never beat anyone, which has driven him to outreach on Charter exchange the devil was the only thing left to him.

Erap's rule was short-lived though his reach limit. I do not know what might have happened if he had only half lived up to his vow of being "first estate as anything." But he turned out to be a lousy "first estate as anything," overwhelmed by a tidal of headlines dedicated to sapping off this country. I recall that there was a time when I could not imagine how much lower this country could sink. It seemed like the entire pits—the mud of the lane, rock bottom. Until even Erap came on his coattails.

But that is not what makes our situation one for the books. That is not what makes our situation so scary as Ripley's "Believe it Or Not." What does is that Come Jennery now over GMA will be the longest-occupier of Malacañang "longest-serving president" in control only to "forgive"—and she can never control into office.

She came to power the first time around by the vote cast by the...or the...of the people in the wake of the ouster of then-president Joseph Estrada. Raul Gonzalez...now wants to jump on the face of the GMA People Power. She thing to power of on May 2004 by calling up Gonzo and demanding to step by a million votes over FPJ, which she did. Indeed twice—though the first to begin with while the second is not—she was elected second president of this country.

There's more for Ripley: Come January now term, GMA will have been the longest occupant of Malacañang since 1986 despite having million lowest ever recipient. Indeed, despite being so vilified and cyberated. Forget the rumors that show that. Mind only that another Gon are Ramos not Erap was ever lambled by a crushed while addressing a graduating class. No, not even Erap despite his English. Indeed, GMA was stressing the importance of English when it happened, which only shows that history seems to commend more than a fit duty as that language.

Come January now now, GMA will have been the longest occupant of Malacañang since 1986 despite overtaking only the biggest residue of Filipinos abroad. As of the last survey, fully a third of the population wants to leave this country, probably indicative that only the number of Filipinos who'd be content to do it. If you count those without means but would like to, you would probably be counting nearly the entire population. With good reason. Entering of the 21st century, which was hugely GMA's watch, has been the undoing of many Filipinos into the twilight of hunger. Literally for the first time in decades, hunger is spreading throughout the land with only the OFW billions-to-date in dozen.

Come January now now, GMA will be the longest occupant of Malacañang without Ripley's chains to congratulate. Indeed, with an applaud cutting that is intensely proportional to Erap's popularity the other Filipino leader has driven such a palpable anger and distrust, consternation and disgust.

Indeed, come January now now, GMA will be the longest occupant of Malacañang despite, knowing lying and cheating into accept able instances, to vast swarthy of mendacities, which some more than twice to consider, to witness their comfort to her last footsteps in case Congress rules and meltdown into calmness of polity, to witness the alarming number of political activists and journalists in the provinces and in Metro Manila gunned down. Let which seems to be alarming only the global community and not the national one, wherein up the country back to the scene of destruction, even the Reps in Congress now want to impeach her. Let the Senate boys gunned down. Let raise if they like it or not. Despite all this, or maybe because of all this.

Believe it or not.

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Custody issue straining RP-US relations

RENE LEGAL COLUMNIST JOSEC SISON points out the ambiguity of President Arroyo's order to file the Visiting Forces Agreement, which provides for US custody of an American serviceman accused of a crime here, pending the completion of judicial proceedings. The ambiguity is evident in two provisions: "responsibility to exercise jurisdiction," he said.

Columnist Rodolfo Pascual has described what is to him the real security challenge to his work. The lawyer of Carlos Cpl. Daniel Smith and two Philippine government witnesses disclosed that the appeal in a rape case against the former Visiting Forces member will presumably the Supreme Court—in part of three "judicial proceedings." The CA has refused to grant the TRO sought by Smith's lawyer, until the case can be heard. On the accusation, many legal are growing louder about the events in RP-US relations the case is running and how the would, including measures been on forging a similar agreement with RP is weathering a very heavily.

* * *

It's a right fix for the government. Since appears that instead of joining Smith's lawyers and Pascual, Sison, the government would rather concentrate more in adding for a review of the VFA to remove such prey areas."

But we all know that a review or renegotiation must usually take more perhaps years. In the meantime, RP-US relations are in a state of uncertainties. Suppose about this are the folklore.

The VFA was signed between the US and RP on Feb. 10, 1999 and ratified by our Senate in May. Some other are still reviewed, among them Franklin Drilon, Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Teofisto Guingona III, Juan Ponce Enrile, Rodolfo Biazon and Ramon Magsaysay Jr. What have they to say about the case? participated. Let's hope they're not just waiting to see where the wind will blow.

* * *

Some silliest. Power is said to have been recommended to the Makati RTC by "the Feds," a the time Andres Cruz was the chief presidential legal adviser. A few months after it was passed, the VFA's constitutionality was challenged in the Supreme Court, which later rejected overwhelmingly. It first it was created passed. The late Senator Wenceslao Vinzons Jr. and when the custody issue reached it, it would be interesting to see in which direction the highly politicized Court would tilt. To be watched, aside from Pascual's case, would be those of the Lrap applicants, notably the women parishes.

* * *

Some bishops have decried the "selective silence" of the Roman members who pushed for an without Senate participation. But everyone has a motive, including the senators; the latter have offered explanations of purchase Pascual case. Others that the Senate is now pushing, although 14 senators signed a resolution supporting Lee not effective years ago, when the Senate was pushing for a Con-con. Now the senators have changed their minds and have proposed to reconstitute a 24 attendant simultaneously with the May 2007 elections, to find out. If the people really want Charter change, What will it become?

* * *

Meaning plain on that some senators don't want a parliamentary-only-federal system because they have ambitions to run for president. There's nothing wrong with this, but they should be more honest about their motives instead of dodging at the issue.

Again, from abolishing the Senate, a shift to a unicameral parliamentary federal system would by in improving the quiz districts with their spouses, children or siblings. Those include former President Manuel Villar and Senators Edgardo Angara and Rodolfo Biazon. Ka'abot brother, Senator Roy Ibardolaza, claim to remember the Senate as his family. Among the Ebreista there's too only 3 to see 10!

* * *

All kinds of vacuous are being offered for last Sunday's re-affir's mid-term Court. I think most people were interested to see midterm, since it was just two Sundays before Christmas. Those perhaps people are not the right question Cha-cha is the media's been-dominating. Until it has to point to the voters by attending a double portion of the people against Cha-cha, but as Standard columnist Raul Locsin noted, the question appears to be so ordained that there could be no other answer but a negative one. Everything is open enough many people want change to our present political system. But perhaps they don't know how to go about it.

* * *

I can see President Fidel Ramos' former secretary Ching Montinola, recently and she opined that there ought to be a massive information campaign about Charter change. I agree. Such a campaign would help counter the media's drubbing on Cha-cha. A friend of mine, who's bright and normally level headed about issues, was on cloud up about Cha-cha and it was good for optimal up to me. It was simply upon hearing that the House members intended to put up an interim parliament where they would sit with the Senate of an election up to 2010. I said that was an old idea that's been dropped with the scrapping of Con-con and she blame has proposed synchronized elections for Con-con delegates and executive officials once May. Then she Con-con would be convened at the end of the second half of 2007, well after the elections, which is what the bishops want. The bishops should embrace a dialogue with House leaders.

Dreading Christmas

I DREAD THE CHRISTMAS SEASON, AND IT IS NOT ONLY because at this time of the year, you are forced to be happy even if you feel that the whole world has turned against you, or because you're expected to spend obscene amounts of money to buy gifts, or because you get to hear seven (but not twenty) renditions of traditional Christmas carols performed by amateur singers who can't carry a tune but who have the bodies and the chutzpah to go from subway-crowding auditions to singing contests. It is for none because my ears are flooded with the hideous murdered-ing of children who just become through

YOUNG BLOOD

Jose Miguel Arguelles

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the (semi)overachieving and below.—Ed.

their lungs and expect to be given their (fair) one piece. No, there's things are peripheral concerns. What I love most about the season is going home.

Home is Zamboanga City. And home is where my father is.

Don't get me wrong. I love my father, who, despite being a grouch, can sucessfully be a softie in the most unexpected moments. And I love my mom to a point where to us, sacrificing the confines of home to work in the United States for 20-odd years, though now he is retired. What I dread is the pressure he never fails to exert on the whenever I sit home. The pressure to leave my last paying teaching job in Quezon City, my family, my friends, my social to society students to seek stricter life in America. He often tells me that I have no future in this country and this indirectly that country has no future at all.

Every Christmas, which is the time I usually go home, he urges me to go where the pastures are supposedly greener and where milk and honey supposedly flow from fountains. And whenever he goes through this routine, I end up doubting myself. Doubting whether I made the right decision years ago to become an educator, whether I made the right decision to stay and help the volunteer students who will someday leave the country, whether in those years I have invested so much time and love here mostly.

These doubts are compounded every time I run into my former schoolmates and classmates—both those who stuck outside the country and those who have stayed but completely unaware of money. Every Christmas, I tend to avoid malls whenever I can, but I still end up in them. I become more vehement I hate them will abate their plan to spend the time Christmas with the whole family in a foreign country or about the gifts they intend to give as their loved ones. The stories are enough to crush my spirit because when I look at my situation, I know I cannot afford to give my family the same things. I mean, a public school teacher doesn't make millions a year—not even a quarter of a million. I seem to part that some of my students' monthly allowance is bigger than my salary.

All these experiences await me in Zamboanga. And every time I'm there, I end up even more in thoughts of leaving this country.

My friends I can avoid, of course. But not my father. And his statements always have a profound effect on me. When he wears a simple sometimes like, "You should leave." I find myself being very in doubt. I ask myself questions like: Am I foolish for staying? Am I been shortchanging myself all these years? Am I not doing what my family expects of me? Is it true that I have no future in this country? That this country doesn't have a future?

This year, a few people took lavishly upon wanking. A lot of people see the job as less suited for women, or as a stepping stone to a better job, or as a profession fit only for those who have nothing better to do.

My father has always disapproved of my decision to become an educator. He hasn't said it to my face, but I can hear it in his voice and I can see it in his eyes. I can sense it every time he speaks me by saying, "How come my son, the great teacher."

(Note this his disappointment a few years ago when for the entire time I was home on vacation, he insisted one more than 10 sentences to me. That was after I defended my career and told him that teaching was, in fact, an honorable profession.

I realize I can't if we are charged with changing those who will shape the future of this country and yet we are not regarded well. It makes every time I hear me in a subregular being another line "hang there long."

Sometimes, I think of not going home because the same things will be said and I will only end up depressed in the season of joy. But then, there's my mother who has been angry over all my decisions.

I am glad Christmas comes only once a year. It's good that I only have to come home in December, otherwise I might just pack my bags and fly to America and leave everything behind.

Yes, I dread Christmas. The only thing that makes the season a little more bearable is looking forward to the New Year when I will be 31 years old. I've decided that the next 11 months, I don't have to think about leaving. There will be no one telling me in a gruff voice and with disapproving eyes that I have wasted my potential by saying this job that barely pays my bills. For 11 months, all I have to think about is teaching, guiding and hoping that my students will become better persons because of me.

I hope that by then, I will have recovered to ask me why I chose to be a teacher, why I shifted from electrical engineering to education. I hope he will ask me that question when I come home this time. I have the answer. Call me an idealist, call me a romantic, but every time I enter a classroom, I see 30 young faces filled with possibilities. I see the faces of the future. And I realize that the country does have a good future—it just has to survive here. And saving that is worth more than a good life spent somewhere else.

Jose Miguel Arguelles, 28, is a teacher at the Philippine Science High School in Quezon City.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS:

Send your contributions by e-mail to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph, together with your address, age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or, if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with. Cartoons by Youngblood should not have been previously published.

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Reclaiming public water

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

A NATIVE SAYS ONCE IN METRO MANILA (I do not say real life) you will never thirst.

There is something that water managers, providers, customers, conservationists, activists and scientists, etc. might need to read. It is "Water, Democracy, Public Policy and Globalization: Struggles and Visions from Around the World." It is about wide-ranging approaches to reforming water policy, to water theories that are being practiced in developing countries, to water activists and egovernance, and to innovation. I don't have the book. But I have the abstract and biography descriptions of it.

It was published in 2005 by the Series on Public-based prerogatives International Institute and Corporation Observatory. Other books in the series are "Reclaiming the Grounds of International Water Reforms," picked up the abstract and several papers on water privatization at the recent Irish Europe Resource Center in Dublin. The book's purpose is to examine in some detail developing countries' struggles among the life-and-death issues discussed there, to think (I thought, what's water doing in debates about globalization?) and to "democratize" it. Especially, I wished that water, or access to it, is no longer just a basic human right, it has also become a commodity, a merchandise, what with water companies being privatized and water sector by giant multinationals out to make big profits.

The announcement on the water rate hike the other day was like a dousing of cold water on the topic. Suddenly, you're bombarded with the issue of having public hearing more. But it also like that when the cold and icy season begins—it is for us, it augurs ease but not dry and humid one, and people will resort to take a bath more often, wash clothes more and drink more water. Likewise, it is indeed ironic, for we have just experienced three years of the scarcity that has wiped out villages.

So are we worse or are we not?

We are getting a double whammy. For didn't they announce earlier that there will be a water shortage in the national capital region (NCR) in the coming months? The water levels in the reservoirs will dip, while the rates will soon in this above the law of supply and demand?

* * *

Above water services were privatized 10 years ago, consumers thought their water woes would end. I remember doing a front page, three-part series on big slow water charges. Complaints are endless. Consumers, especially those in the fringes, by the Angat 1000-and Ipo to 2003, where public water was hardly mentioned.

The senior South-Asia Pacific Manager for Public and Water Services and Water Resources Division in the Asia-Pacific Region" presents privatization as "actually concrete" is the close partnership between global giant Suez and the Lopez-owned Manila Electric Company Services and the joint venture between transnational United Utilities and Ayala Corporation Manila Water Company. The World Bank had hailed these partnerships as the first large-scale water supply private hailers in Asia.

The key drive for privatization in the Asia-Pacific is regime. Privatization projects, the study says, are either explicit or included as part of loan conditions and conditionalities for borrowing countries or are pushed by the private sector. Private sector participation is also encouraged or required by international financial institutions.

Has privatization resulted in better services and affordable and safe water for many? Have other social benefits also been generated? There are now many studies on successful schemes in developing countries that the Philippines could learn from; there is also a balanced point not to be for-or-against. But what is needed to base a good water system is clarity.

Ifa Teste Chan of Camboula, 2006 Ramon Magsaysay awardee for Government Service, has this to say: "Water is a public trust and should not be treated as a toll. Fix, re-engineer and manage, with input and for the exemplary rehabilitation of a ruined public utility and/or bringing safe drinking water to a million people in Phnom Penh. He not his entire family to the following basics of the conservation Mineur Bogor tea he turned on to help in his country's rehabilitation.

He's been in support. He and his associates had set a major overhaul of the water system and discussed that it could be done. It was a heroic feat for a government bureaucrat.

Misbehaving Books

* * *

(mceres@inquirer.com.ph)

A disservice to democracy

LET US ALL CLAMOR THE RESOLUTION ... [illegible] ... Congress into a coordinate assembly.

If the House idea of a Con-Con had squeaked through, the incumbent solons who compose the present 13th Congress will sit in the bicameral Parliament without having to run for election, as provided in the transitory article of their proposed new charter. After the two-in parliament shall have met in course, they can run again for the same seat under the regular parliament — with all the advantages and perks of incumbency....and not and run against [illegible].

It is an unworthy of our democracy — a democracy that are desperately trying to hold on their will. They can tell themselves as the "majority-vote government" but they do not, cannot, represent the majority of the Filipino people.

It is possible that most Filipinos do not see the malicious, self-serving motives of these [illegible].

—MANUEL L. VALDEHUESA JR.
valdemar_ray@yahoo.com

LETTERS

Exploiting ignorance for personal gain

SO MANY THINGS HAVE GONE wrong in recent times – by design. It is time we asked ourselves when it is that makes our leaders indulge in willful deception to get what they want.

The saying is that ignorance is once more, but this cannot happen when leaders are honest and they do their duty in preventing the unjust oppression and manipulation of situations for personal gain.

Of course, that can happen when leaders are dishonest. Still, importance and greed first destroy the "inner" world, then the "outer" world, which is seen as the public service dimensions. And it is the people in general who suffer as a consequence, which is felt when they are deprived of basic needs like education, food, shelter, clothing and other social welfare needs. Which is a criminal offense given that these are the first things a government must provide its citizens. Indeed, we have the funds to provide these needs but not the kind of leadership our nation needs.

The solution then is clear: leaders who fail to address the problems should give way to those who can do the job. But what if those leaders refuse to resign or to retire?

That is the problem. We lend on our "inner self" and other means of deception to do this. They even fight like savages over turfs, budgets, jurisdiction and even "pork barrel." Didn't they fight for Chavez' change after "flirting" had turned parts of Metro Manila into? The question the people must now answer are many.

For example, if voting around, lying to popularity or charisma to get one's way politicians in power, what do we do now? Do we change the entire system or just the politicians who messed up the system? More important, are we willing to save our country from "corruption"? Are we brave enough now to clean out the mess?

Or will we, as we have been doing for much too long, just keep quiet so as not to create disorder?

—GILBERT E. BAUTISTA
[illegible]

Church influence waning in RP

THE LOW TURNOUT AT THE Dec. 17 "Thanksgiving" prayer rally at the Luneta, which was led by the Catholic Church in a clear indication of the waning influence of this once-venerable institution. In essence how the organizers undermine the poor attendance, it turns out that the people are tired of all these useless display of "vigilance."

But a more glaring implication is that the Church has lost its strong influence on the Filipino people. For centuries, we accepted blindly its ministers' foolish "guidances" on issues (e.g., population control) and their wholesale rejection of the principle of the separation of Church and State. It took that rally to make them realize that they should only stay in their role as God's agents and not play gods.

We have already enough problems in this country and they should refrain from politicking. Francisco Sonza will be [illegible] is true such a wish. It was full of opportunities. Vigilance is all right and healthy for a democracy, but misguided vigilance is a nuisance.

—HELVIN SONZA
[illegible]

THE 'THANKSGIVING' prayer rally for the supposed death of Cory and Dia-cha

Why few people joined the prayer rally in Luneta

1. MANY WERE TURNED OFF with the softening of the bishops' position. This is beside the fact that nowadays few people go to Mass on Sundays.

2. The massive disinformation campaign by Malacañang's phone stalwart brigades.

3. The news that Gloria Macapagal Arroyo would attend the prayer rally.

4. The threat of the military that politicians and celebrities would be arrested if they were on stage.

5. The fear that the military and policemen who were mobilized by Malacañang would not hesitate to kill and fondle civilians.

6. The banning of speeches touching on politics, as well as of streamers, placards and flags.

7. The warning issued by Malacañang that terrorists and communist rebels were out to use the rally for their own purposes.

8. The blockades put up by the military in all entry points to prevent would-be rally participants from reaching Luneta.

9. The chilling effect of the cold-blooded murder of Mike Rapsing.

10. Chito's early pronouncement that she's backing off from pursuing Dia-cha and Con-ass.

—ISAAC L. SOSAS,
frankyancyan@yahoo.com.sg

Judge Pozon's decision on Nicole case commendable

JUDGE BENJAMIN PUEBLO'S decision on Hubby's case was very commendable. I don't understand why there are still people, like Grace Ramos, who are flying to darkest Switzerland to join Lance's [illegible] bunch.

Now that a man like Judge Pozon has decided to stand for the wife, Samoa stands by holding a vigil to demand that Smith be turned over to US custody.

—RICHARD BAUTISTA,
[illegible]

Filipino women are being raped not only in the Philippines but all over the world. They are being abused by foreigners because they know that no one is out there to protect the women.

Now that a man like Judge Pozon has decided to stand for the wife, Samoa stands by holding a vigil to demand that Smith be turned over to US custody.

—RICHARD BAUTISTA,
[illegible]

Our leaders' unbelievable pride in 'supermaids'

UNTIL NOW I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE that the so-called leaders of our country are taking pride in seeing their sisterhood expressed as "supermaids."

These college graduates and highly educated Filipinas worked hard to get through school only to be reduced as supermaids, even as they are dubbed as the country's new heroes.

The sun is setting grave insult to injury. Maybe we, our country, and our so-called leaders should be ashamed!

—ROMONG RAMIREZ,
3241 N Benjamin Holt Dr.,
Stockton, CA 95207-3349

One October in San Francisco

COMMENTARY

Geronima Pilos R. Martin
Institute on Church and Social Issues

I SPENT TEN HOLY MONTHS OF last October in the United States, specifically San Francisco, Los Angeles and, very briefly, Las Vegas. It was a long planned trip and much needed break from it was a respite by my hometown; it was the kind of vacation that I have always wanted. I saw new places, I visited good old friends, I shopped, I had fun and I relaxed. I expect to have said about it in the morning (although my body clock would make me up between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.). And even if I had to do some reading or writing, I did it leisurely and without stress.

Upon its return, most of my Filipinos from downtown to the busy building and Port 39, rode the cable car to reach Fisherman's Wharf, ran, visited the Pigeon of Lombard Street, cruised and took an overnight tour of the Golden Gate Bridge and Bay Bridge, spent an afternoon in Santa Cruz and reached the Twin Peaks to enjoy a sight view of San Francisco. I was also able to commune with nature in Yosemite, and go round the 17 mile drive in Monterey, Carmel and Big. Then I drove up to see.

UCLA, I was mostly confined in the northern part, Bathurst specifically. I saw the 20 presentations of "Wicked" and "The Terminator" in Universal Studios, appreciated Emperor on in the Getty Museum, gathered in the Grove and Sta. Monica Pier, and went around the Pike in Long Beach. The brief visit in Las Vegas took me and my best friend to the Strip to see various hotels and casinos like Caesar's Palace, the Venetian, Paris, Bellagio and Treasure Island. On the whole, I spent more for shopping than gambling.

During the two-day transit, I was blessed with the kindness of friends who had to struggle during their first years in the United States, yet offered me new room. Hats a home. Each has a story to tell of how they have endured a life of being physically distant from their loved ones and managed to do well.

Rosie left a husband and two children for the United States to explore in development work. Three years ago, Rosie was nothing dollars about getting a job. She involved herself in various volunteer work from the site to the west coast, hoping to link up with the right development agency overseas ally. While she found a more regular job in the process, she continues with her socio-civic work and assists fellow Filipinos who are in the same situation she was three years ago.

With a 2-year, Dina graduated her opportunity to reach special education in an elementary school in the San Rosa town. Dube had to leave her husband and five kids in Mindanao. Without any comfortable facility or form of entertainment in her apartment, coming home from work in her free time works in America was a harrowing experience. With the help of friends, she was able to adapt to put up the necessary appliances, furniture and fixtures, computer and the internet that would help her commune to her family and friends in the Philippines. She now looks forward to being reunited soon with her two youngest children, aged 3 and 9, who were recently granted J-1 visas.

Back in 1998, Anna and her husband were worried about their sons getting associated with strangers in the mall or people with dubious backgrounds. To prevent the sons from going astray, they decided to enroll the children in a military school in the United States where they hoped the boys would become more disciplined and safe.

Left behind in the Philippines, the couple suddenly found themselves facing long-standing issues in their relationship which it became too complicated to mend. Anna chose to join her sons and find a life of her own in the United States. She eventually found a job that paid enough to support her and the children. With some help from time to time, she was able to finance the school requirements of the boys.

There are stories with happy endings of making it abroad. Not all succeed, however, end up happily.

Because of the lack of opportunities, continuing political scandals and bickering, aggravated by natural disasters, more and more Filipinos find themselves seeking greener pastures abroad even if it means being away from loved ones. In 2005, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration reported the highest deployment of overseas workers, having assisted almost a million OFWs to more than 190 countries of destination. The POEA also said that an average of 2,700 Filipino workers left daily that year mainly for land- and sea-based jobs. Some were duped by recruitment agencies and ended up landing flimsy jobs about which they were not told before they left the Philippines.

We hear of grassroots centers and repositories suffered by OFWs in various parts of the world — ranging from an engineer now pay to poor unemployed women and physical, mental and emotional abuse by employers.

There are six usual reported stories. But there are too the countless unreported cases which reveal unbearable tales. Where-called workers who speak or read up with less-other jobs; professionals in clerk-file or file-entering store, mostly doing clerical tasks; health or military workers caring for the elderly almost perfect their chore into parents or relatives at home; whose families migrating and uniting into the unfamiliar; the lowered who cannot come home to pay last respects to their dead.

During one vacation trip in December, a former colleague who has been staying in California for almost 20 years now, asked, "Is it really that bad in the Philippines?" This about to bombard her with statistics and figures in an informal gathering of friends, I answered her by citing the case of another friend who is being pestered by her father since the 1980s.

In the past, she had never thought of leaving; she wanted only to devote all her talents for the country; today, she admits that there is no particular desire to stay. If she wants, it is truly sad for the Philippines to lose another useful citizen. This likely Filipino migrant, though, may still be considered luckier than most others who have no option or recourse but to leave because of need.

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9 backpackers linked to rebs freed

By Desiree Caluza
Inquirer Northern Luzon

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—THE NINE BACKPACKers who were arrested in February for their supposed involvement in a communist raid on a military detachment in Mankayan town would spend Christmas with their families after a local court ordered their release on Wednesday.

Judge Benigno Galoguic, of the Benguet regional trial court, on Tuesday dismissed for lack of evidence the homicide and arson cases filed by the police against the group.

"This is a very early Christmas gift for us. I still never ever forget this experience. We are now free."

Lao was among the backpackers who called their group "Parks 'n Us." The group's members were from Metro Manila, the Bicol, Southern Tagalog and Ilocos City.

Lao and his eight companions were arrested on Feb. 14 and released from the Benguet provincial jail before noon.

The group originally included a 17-year-old boy from Iloilo City and a 16-year-old girl from Manila via City. The minors were released in May after their lawyers cited the Juvenile Justice Law that protects minors from criminal prosecution.

Benguet policemen and soldiers arrested them while they were on their way to Sagada, Mt. Province. They said they were going to the tourist town for an adventure week.

But Chief Supt. Raul Gonzales, Cordillera police director, said the Benguet police had evidences to support claims that the backpackers had participated in the Feb. 10 raid conducted by the New People's Army in Mankayan.

A soldier and two government militiamen were killed in that raid.

"We, the Parks 'n Us, have worked the best Christmas gift. We learn the Benguet provincial jail after more than 10 months of inconvenience (for) charges that we are innocent of," the group said in a statement they read in the jail courtyard.

"We thank our parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives who stood by us during the difficult times. This experience made us closer to each other. We have realized the value of family unity and love," they said.

Their relatives, lawyers and human rights groups led by the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA) and the Free Legal Assistance Group (Flag) prepared a petition for the group's release, a day after the group was freshened and rushed for a hunt.

"This case only proved that there is a need for better police work so mistakes will not happen anymore. Ten months of their lives were wasted."

Public Information Chief Insp. Jobin Vallejo Tabanda, one of the group's lawyers, told the lawyers.

Beverly Longid, former CHRA vice chair, said the dismissal of the case only proved that the group was innocent of the charges.

She said the backpackers suffered mental and physical torture from the police during their detention.

In earlier interviews, Benguet police officials had denied that they abused or harassed the backpackers.

Apart from Lao, those released were Jaroslaw Jankowski, 30; Jethro Villagracia, 21; Ran Pandoyo, 19; Darwin Magat, 20; Aldo Christian Madona, 30; Adrienne de la Rosa, 26; Neil Ronad Balagadia, 22; and Kevin Nuñez, 21.

Their arrest and detention sparked protests and online petition for their release gathered more than 2,000 signatures from the Philippines and abroad.

Florditlize Mabuza, mother of Aldo Christian Madona, said her son's experience has changed his outlook in life.

"He has learned a lot from this experience. He said he wanted to go back to school and it was glad to hear that," Florditlize Madona said.

Soldiers stop farmers from attending rights forum

BAGUIO CITY—A GROUP OF farmers from Tadlidlay, Kalinga, failed to attend a human rights forum in the capital town of Tabuk after soldiers held and questioned them at a checkpoint for two hours, according to a human rights group here.

Imelda Tabbuada, deputy secretary general of Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA), said the farmers were questioned by soldiers from the Army's 23rd Infantry Battalion about the purpose of the activity held on Dec. 13.

CHRA officials, in a forum here this week, also said some residents of Balbalan reported that they were not allowed by the military to leave the town's poblacion.

Maj. Ferdinand Bautista, spokesperson of the military's Northern Luzon Command, and officials of the 23rd IB had denied that they harassed farmers in Balbalan.

"The head of the 23rd IB (still) denied (that such a thing happened. They even celebrated the International Human Rights Day last week)," Bautista said in a telephone interview.

But he promised to investigate the complaints.

Tabbuada said members of nongovernment organizations who wanted to look into the situation of villagers in Balbalan were being prevented from entering some villages.

"The military has a policy that those who would visit Cherokee Village sign in a log book so they could monitoring all people in the area," she said.

Jude Bangit, CHRA staff member, said Balbalan and other towns in Kalinga are considered by the military as strongholds of the New People's Army. —Desiree Caluza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

MORNING CHILL
Families, teenagers and children are all bundled up because of cold temperatures while attending midnight Mass at the Baguio Cathedral.

Phivolcs equipment in Bulusan disappear

SORSOGON CITY—THE PHILIPpine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology have lost some P2.1 million worth of vital assets when vandals took several units of monitoring equipment in one of its monitoring sites around the Bulusan Volcano last Sunday, a Phivolcs official said.

Cirilo Dimalanta, officer-in-charge of the Phivolcs monitoring station based here, said among those missing were one unit of SG-Digitizer worth P1 million, seismometers which cost P50,000, five solar-powered batteries worth P50,000 and supervisory unit with processing cable costing P50,000.

Dolores said the equipment, which were installed in Barangay Salvacion in Irosin town, were very vital, especially the K-2 digitizer as it served as the link of all the monitoring equipment in Barangays San Roque, Bulusan and Loom's Trail in Bulusan, Irosin as the main monitoring station here.

Phivolcs director Renato Solidum Jr. appealed to Gov. Raul Lee and other local officials to help them recover the equipment.

Solidum said their office is hoping to restore greatly impaired, considering that Bulusan remained under Alert Level 1 and had shown signs of unrest in recent months.

At 1:09 a.m. of Dec. 20, Bulusan Volcano spewed ash anew, said the personnel on duty at the volcano's observatory here.

"It is not possible to evacuate the barangays of the explosion as it was still dark and because of heavy rains in the area," said Orlando Gueldenzoph, Phivolcs volcano research specialist.

He said ashfalls were monitored in Barangays Monbon and Puting Sapa, Irosin.

Village chief Maurice Perpas of Barangay Puting, Irosin said "fallout from Barangay River in Bulusan town reached their area."

Guardianos said the ashfall was measured at 2 mm in Monbon, and 0.5 mm in Poblacion.

Meanwhile, in its latest advisory issued Dec. 14, Phivolcs said Taal Volcano had been acting up, accompanied by 18 volcanic earthquakes, increasing water acidity and hydrothermal activity.

Renato Solidum, Phivolcs volcanologist at the Taal Volcano Observatory in Talisay, Batangas, said the volcano remained at Alert Level 1.

The volcano's main crater should be "strictly off-limits to the public," and that the northwest portion of Taal's main crater rim along the Daang Kastila Trail might also be hazardous, the Phivolcs advised.

Talisay Mayor Florencio Maralit has been asked to intensify security measures for tourists entering the crater. —Bobby Lobañon and Marilou Guinto, Inquirer Southern Luzon

Roundup

Cargo ship runs aground

ILOILO (PANAY) CITY—A cargo ship carrying some 6,000 metric tons of fertilizer was beached by strong winds and waves in Bakhawan, Cagayan, on Sunday. Police said no one was hurt when the ship was pushed inland. The ship was on its way to Sta. Ana from Mariveles when bad weather struck waters off Barangay Camalaniugan. Capt. Ian Richard Bernardo reported missing when their boat capsized also on Sunday, police said. —Jaime Da Cruz, Inquirer Northern Luzon

Inquirer man top Baguio citizen

BAGUIO CITY—Marcelo Rosal reporter for Inquirer Northern Luzon received one of the outstanding citizens of Baguio City awards for championing indigenous culture and rights. Mariano and eight other outstanding residents will receive their awards on Dec. 30. Mariano, who covers Benguet, was cited for his documentation of the Kankanaey and Baguio elders' ancestral domain management in Bakun, Benguet, and their traditional resource management practices. Other Thirteen awardees are Rita Ofilan, pioneer in Cordillera literature; Alfred Mercedes Garcia, Magsaysay Laureate; Policarpio Rimas and Betty Lourdes Salanda (community services); Gerber Bicyclastronics; Hubert Tinder (art/sports); and Peter Dilatis (media). —Desiree Caluza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

NPA rebel shoots in-law

VIRAC, Catanduanes—An alleged New People's Army member shot his son-in-law suspected of supplying 15 hp four-cut slasher in Barangay Rapa in the capital town last week. A police report said Edmund Arcilla, 29, a tricycle driver identified the suspect as his father-in-law, Noel Magno, with the case of an unarmed handgun using MP-28 bullets at 1:30 p.m., Dec. 11. Police station investigators said the victim's wife is the daughter of leading rebel figure, Rosely, daughter and younger sister of Bonifacio Magno. The suspect, allegedly an NPA member whose whereabouts is still unknown, was charged by the Army's 51st as an accomplice early this year. Rosely Arcilla was being treated at the Eastern Bicol Medical Center. —Ferver Elmar, Inquirer Southern Luzon

Duterte to vandals: 'I'll kill you'

DAVAO CITY—The P195-million synchronized traffic signalization project has also started operating on Monday. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte said bottlenecks in areas where the traffic lights have been installed were expected to ease but warned that the honeymoon period "It is not yet perfect. We are still adjusting accordingly," he said. Duterte said the city government and project contractor will study how the system would work and make modifications if necessary. Duterte also warned against attempts to destroy any of the traffic signal equipment. "Do not touch these. I will really kill if that happens," he said after reports indicated that vandals have destroyed one of the push-walk buttons recently installed. Earlier, Duterte said he was thinking of adding penalties to safeguard the equipment. —Kimberly Jane, Inquirer Mindanao

Number of missing fishermen rises to 93

By Gabriel Cardinoza
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BAGUIO CITY—THE NUMBER of fishermen from at least four coastal towns of Pangasinan reported missing since last week rose forward to 93 on Wednesday.

Police said the number increased after they started receiving reports from relatives of Agoo, Damil, Bauang and Balaoan towns about their missing relatives. The fishermen reportedly set out to sea last week but their vessels were battered by huge waves and strong wind.

Police, however, said at least 56 fishermen from Infanta and Sagud-Bahley have been rescued since last week.

Fred Castelo, chair of the municipal disaster coordinating council of Balaoan, said three fishermen from his town, who were listed among those missing, were rescued by some merchants of a passing vessel and were now in Dasol, Pangasinan.

They were identified as Victor Campaña, 33, Ramil Lavina, 27, and Maurizio de los Santos, 18, all residents of Sitio Aranum in Barangay Concordia.

On Wednesday, Sitio Informers said the fishermen had arrived big fishing boats continued to scour a wide area near the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea for possible survivors, according to Supt. Rey Tamondong, operations officer of the Pangasinan police.

Tamondong said as of 10 a.m. Wednesday, 63 fishermen from Infanta were still missing, 14 from Bolinao, 13 from Dasol and three from Agoo.

Ricky Diaz, 25, one of the survivors, said they encountered strong winds and waves midnight of Dec. 13 to 14. At an earlier reported, he said the same conditions at sea remained on Saturday.

Survivor's account

Rescue operations began only on Tuesday after a survivor found the bodies of neighboring Isla Cruz, Zambales and reported the incident to authorities there.

"Nagulat po kami sa sobrang lakas ng alonpo. Parang hugis (We) were surprised by the very strong wind. It was like a typhoon," he said. It was too late for us to return to shore," Diaz said.

He said they were about 100 nautical miles from Infanta at that time and going back would take them at least eight hours.

Diaz said he had encountered the weather disturbances, locally called "ramada (tooth wind)," before but "this one is very different."

To prevent their boat from capsizing, Diaz said he and his five companions took turns the whole time the north wind was blowing in reasing to their boat's moving, just to keep it balanced every time a giant wave struck them.

Diaz said they decided to sail home Sunday morning and picked up along the way four fishermen clinging to their overturned banca.

Charles Mangay, barangay captain of the fishing village of Caleruega, where most of the missing fishermen come from, said hundreds of relatives of the missing have been waiting day and night at the Infanta town hall, where an operations center has been set up, hoping to hear news about their relatives.

Sad Christmas

"Malungkot po ang Pasko nyan. Ayaw na nilang mag-isip (This will have a sad Christmas because of the tragedy)," Mangay said in the banca.

He said at least more than 100 families in his village, at least 300 are out to sea to fish on Dec. 14. Small boats had three to five passengers, while the bigger ones had six to eight, he said.

Barangay said some of those rescued off Zambales were taken to a hospital in the capital town of Iba. Those rescued by a passing United States Navy ship on Sunday and later carried over to authorities in Subic have remained home, he said.

Tamondong said although no dead fishermen has been found yet, a survivor has given up hope that he would still see his 15-year-old son alive.

Tamondong said Alberto Dena-dao had told him that he saw his son, Alberto Jr., drown. The elder Penaloo said he failed to save his son because of the strong waves.

In Bolinao, Camelo said the three rescued fishermen's vessel, the Mitsy I, had capsized.

"It was fortunate that they had a flashlight with them, so the crew of MV Mineral, which was on its way to China, saw them on the night of Dec. 16," Camelo said.

MV Mineral radioed the Philippine Coast Guard detachment in Bolinao and informed local officials about the incident.

China-bound

Camelo said the cargo vessel could not reach any Philippine port as it took the fishermen to China.

"We asked the PCG to contact the cargo vessel so the three fishermen can be brought back to the Philippines," Camelo said. With reports from Rolando Sotelo-Panelo, Inquirer Northern Luzon

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INQUIRER Southern Luzon

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Turning fear into better disaster response

By Andrea Heidel-Echavez
Correspondent

"TAMAKO NA NAMAN BA TAPU, 'Nay? (Are we going to run again, Mother?)" Inday Surapas' 10-year-old son asks every time rain starts to fall.

"Takot na takot na dawn (saving sensitive (We have become very scared every time it rains)," said the 34-year-old mother of six, who lost one of her brothers when Isang-yolanda "Reming" ravaged Albay several weeks ago.

"We had already been warned," Surapas admitted in Filipino. "But we didn't expect the rains to be that bad. It was [indeed] before, not even during Typhoon "Milenyo."

And so on the fateful morning of Dec. 1, Surapas went on with her regular routine of selling vegetables at the public market in Daraga town, confident that "Reming" would just be like the others.

Luckily, she got home before the heavy rains poured and managed to bring all her six children out of their house which were started to rise, reading through her waist (arrows by tying each other to a rope.

Like Surapas, 39-year-old Gloria Dasqallo was on with her daily routine, selling sweet potatoes and cassava as the sun set the day Reming was expected to strike Albay. This, despite reiterated warnings from the Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council and the repeated announcements on radio.

"We needed money to buy food," she explained.

By the time she finished selling at about 9 a.m., the rains and winds had become so strong that the roads were impossible to travel. "I couldn't do anything anymore but pray and wait for the rain to stop."

Unfortunately for Dasqallo, when she reached her barangay, her house was no longer there. Along with it perished 12 of her relatives—including her three children, mother, grandchild and daughter-in-law.

About 200 other houses in the village were buried in the mud flow.

'They were pretty good in planning. [But] no matter how prepared you are, there will really be casualties [in any disaster situation]'

Preparedness

"We didn't lack in preparations," said Cedric Daep, head of the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (Apemo). "But the magnitude of the typhoon, especially the rainfall, was just beyond our capability."

Because of Mayon Volcano's unstable condition, evacuation plan in the province has long been in place.

The Apemo has been tasked in having the best disaster response program in the country. It has trained people down to the barangay levels on disaster preparedness and response.

As soon as Pagasa (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) declared Signal No. 3 in Albay, Daep immediately informed Gov. Fernando Gonzalez who, in turn, called each of the mayors to tell them to evacuate people.

But even without instructions, the barangay disaster coordinating councils know that once Signal No. 3 was declared, they had to evacuate people in their areas.

People in the coastal areas are to be evacuated first, followed by those in the steep slopes, then those in areas threatened by mud flow, and those living in houses made of light materials.

By standards, rainfall of 3.5 centimeters would prompt the Apemo to raise alerts to preparedness level 3-4 cm. people will be evacuated and by 6.6 cm. mud flow can be expected. But in the case of Reming, rainfall was to a high of 40.6 cm.

"If we didn't evacuate, more people would have died. There was too much rainfall and winds to handle. Mud flow came very quickly. When visibility became zero at 5 meters, we already braced for the worst. We knew there would be casualty," Daep lamented.

With zero visibility and rains seemingly far from over, Daep gathered his people and led them to prayer.

Callwer, Daep said, was also one of the major factors in the high death toll. Because most of the areas badly hit by the mud flow had never been affected before, people refused to heed evacuation warnings.

"One of the causes of disasters is culture. People just wouldn't leave because they were never affected ever since," he said.

Unfortunately, mud flow passed through the residential zone, which never happened before.

At least 130,000 houses have been destroyed, while 40,972 others were damaged.

Room for improvements

Because of the loss of lives, questions have been raised. Can the Apemo do more to lessen the impact of disasters such as the struggle by Reming?

"They were pretty good in planning," Josephine Ronton, Oxfam's typhoon response manager, said, referring to the Apemo. "[But] no matter how prepared you are, there will really be casualties [in any disaster situation]."

Oxfam is one of the international humanitarian organizations helping in disaster response and rehabilitation in Bicol.

Ronton pointed out that in disasters, "risks come from vulnerability, so the risk factors should be addressed to reduce vulnerability."

For instance, most of the houses destroyed were made of light materials. This could be one area the provincial government could look into, especially when they start rehabilitation.

Another area for improvement is the preparedness of households. "There are almost individual responses. But how do you maintain good information channels in the barangay level?" Ronton said.

She said the provincial government should take the opportunity to turn the present sense of fear now of residences into something productive to enable them to respond properly to similar situations in the future.

(The writer is a former business reporter and is now a volunteer of Operation Compassion, a Christian organization doing relief and rehabilitation work in disaster areas. She may be contacted through her mobile phone number: (0921-493.1400.)

INDAY Surapas lost her mother and a brother at the height of Supertyphoon "Reming." She and her six children are staying at the evacuation center in the Bonog Elementary School in Daraga, Albay.

WHEN Gloria Dasqallo, 39, another evacuee, reached her barangay, her house was no longer there. Along with it perished her three children, mother, grandchild, daughter-in-law and six other relatives.

Massive rehabilitation for Bicol's coconut industry

By Ephraim Aguilar
Legaspi City

THE MASSIVE DAMAGE TO coconut trees after three straight typhoons battered the Bicol region in the past three months is seen to limit big coconut industry players here and will have an impact on Bicol's traditional cuisine of vegetables cooked in "gata" or coconut cream.

Josefina Lucenia, 50, a vendor at the Legaspi City Public Market has no choice but to almost double the price of the coconuts she is selling now at P15, P18, and P20 depending on the size, saying it has been the highest price tag of the coconut in her seven years as market vendor.

"[With] very little supply of coconut all over the typhoon. I have to increase my prices since the supplier also increased his price," Lucenia said.

All 35 million coconut trees were damaged in varying degree by Typhoons "Milenyo," "Seniang" and "Reming," which ravaged southeast from Mayon Volcano in Albay and buried at least 250 hectares of land planted to coconut, based on initial reports, according to Alfredo Tello, general manager of the Philippine Coconut Authority (Philnut) in Bicol.

In Bicol, Camarines Sur had the largest area planted to coconut followed by Masbate, Camarines Norte, Albay, Sorsogon, and Catanduanes.

The coconut industry contributes 33.4 percent of the regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to Bicol.

Tello said damage from the three typhoons amounted to P1.7 billion if the value of the nut is pegged at P10 each.

He said the cost of damage is 22 percent of the provincial annual industry income of P10 billion.

Industry impact

The immediate effects of the massive damage would be felt directly by the 250,000 coconut farmers in the region and indirectly by other small stakeholders in the coconut industry, Tello said.

"The people who carry loads of copra for sacking, coal vendors, workers of oil mills and owners of coir-based products would also be affected," he said.

Tello foresees that the shortage of raw materials will adversely affect the big industry players in the region, who are mostly in Albay.

Tuaz in Albay, we have three big oil mills and the Jobidan Enterprises in Camalig town, are some of the country's major exporters of coir-based products," said Tello.

Jocfrey Antolinez Arbolario, chief executive officer of the Coco Technologies Corp. and owner of Jobidan Enterprises, said they have about P2 million in sales after "Milenyo," which delayed their exports.

Cocotech is a world-recognized provider of coconuts made from excelsheet, a bioengineering technology used for soil erosion control, which are being exported to countries like Japan, Korea, Netherlands and the United States.

Rehabilitation plan

Rillo said they have proposed to the Philnut central office and to the CDF (Coconut Industry Investment Fund) Oil Mills Group a P67-million rehabilitation plan which also covers the replanting of seedly damaged trees.

There is a P42-million rehabilitation plan submitted to the Department of Agriculture-Bicol, which covers the Philnut-Bicol's main farm plan to fertilize the moderately damaged trees and speed up their recovery, he added.

Rillo said the amount would come from the P250 million the DA-Bicol would try to acquire from government funds and the Food Agriculture Organization, an international funded organization under the United Nations that provides assistance to agricultural sectors in its member countries.

The DA-Bicol would also offer P100,000 to provide materials for planting short term crops for more affected coconut farmers as an alternative livelihood.

Rillo said another problem was the lack of sources of seed nuts for replanting totally damaged trees since the Samar-Leyte region, which was a potential source of materials after "Milenyo," was also battered by "Seniang" just last week.

Rillo said, the Bicolanos, also have a high consumption of coconut, primarily since delicacies are coconut-based and there are other combined applications.

Investors and market-goers still bought coconut from bar despite the big increase in prices simply because food cooked in "gata" or coconut cream is a mainstay on the dining table of Bicolanos.

COCONUT trees in Bicol suffered massive damage with Supertyphoon "Reming" hitting the region in November. (Jonathan Cellona)

Damage assessment

- 1.8 million coconut trees or 5 percent of 35-million coconut trees in the Bicol area either toppled or uprooted under extreme destruction
- 21.2 million or 58 percent of the total were heavily damaged and would require three years or more to rehabilitate. They are at great risk of dying.
- Therefore or 37 percent of the total were moderately damaged
- 4 million trees slightly damaged that rehabilitation to take 1 to 2 years.

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Welcoat exits with pride

By Phaedra R. Castillo

TALL, quick and brimming with the desire to win of late, Barangay Ginebra last night took a huge step towards its target in this tournament.

The Gin Kings ran Red Bull to the ground with a transition game as fluid and choked the life out of the Barako with a defense that was equally unforgiving for a 94-84 victory that gave Ginebra No. 1 seeding in the Talk 'N Text Philippine Cup semis.

Before a raucous crowd of close to 12,000 at the Araneta Coliseum in Cubao, the Kings displayed one of their finest performances so far, taking control early and finishing with a flurry to close to 12-0.

The victory also shut the door on Red Bull's aspirations of making the semifinals outright while gift-wrapping the No. 2 slot to idle rival San Miguel as the Beermen settled for an uncommon quarterfinal berth after winding up with an 11-7 slate.

It was the seventh straight win for the Kings, but Ginebra talked as if he still wanted to squeeze something out from his rock-solid squad.

"This (making the semis outright) is not our goal," Dichoso told reporters later. "Our goal is to win the championship, win as many games as we can and not take any team lightly.

Rudy Fiorilli was at the losing end of the roaring Ginebra onslaught, shooting 25 points, grabbing 10 rebounds and stealing three times.

Meanwhile, Welcoat posed a huge challenge against Alaska last night before losing, 90-86, to end its campaign on a bright note relative to their ugly debut.

Willie Miller scored 24 points and Tony delos Cruz hooked him up with 20 as the Aces won for the seventh time in 17 games while closing out the Welcoat campaign at 3-11.

The Dragons were in the losing end of a 101-69 victory against the Kings in the inaugural Get 3.

Late Sports
More stories on A23 to 26

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Actress saves sick ma, loses home in fire

Faulty wiring could have caused blaze; victim's 5 pet dogs casualties

THIS is all that's left of the house owned by the Gutierrez family after a two-hour fire ate up the two-story structure early yesterday morning. RALPH LUCES

By DJ Yap
and Raynel San Diego Jr.

ACTRESS AND ENTERTAINMENT advocate Chin-Chin Gutierrez suffered second-degree burns and cuts after a two-hour fire razed her house on Gumamela Street, Barangay Loyola Heights in Quezon City at 3:28 a.m. yesterday.

Fire officials said the 32-year-old actress jumped from the top floor of her two-story house to get to her bedridden mother, Cecilia Arnaldo, who was on the ground floor.

This was confirmed by Anjie Unta, Gutierrez's manager. "She jumped from the second floor, where her bedroom was, as she could get to her mom's room quickly. She was worried the oxygen tank in her mom's room might explode."

Gutierrez was able to save her mother, a diabetic who has been bedridden for the past two months, with the help of her two house helpers.

The actress, however, suffered burns in the hands and feet as well as several cuts as the strong blast out of the house, arms investigators said.

Unta said Gutierrez is now being treated in a hospital for her injuries.

"She's now a little better. But when she was brought to the hospital, she was weak and in extreme pain. The doctors also checked her lungs because they were worried about smoke inhalation," she told the Inquirer.

Her mother, meanwhile, was confined in the intensive care unit on a precautionary measure. Arnaldo had just gotten out of the hospital a month ago.

According to arson investigators, Gutierrez, her mother and their two house helpers were awakened by smoke coming from one of the bedrooms on the second floor. The blaze quickly spread and damaged Gutierrez's two cars parked on the driveway, said SPO4 Jose Nagaoran of the Quezon City fire department.

"The house was razed to the ground. Even though the walls were made of cement, the flooring of the second story was made of wood so the flames spread fast," he told the Inquirer.

Nagaoran said investigators had not yet arrived at an estimate of the property damage, but he added that it could run to millions of pesos because of valuables and cars lost in the blaze.

Filmmaker Rory B. Quintos, who had directed Gutierrez in the ABS-CBN series, "Krystala," last year, appealed for help for the actress and her mother.

"They are in dire need of financial help. The entire house was burned to the ground. They weren't able to save anything... not even their pet dogs," said

ACTRESS, A 20

CHIN-CHIN GUTIERREZ

3 bodies found dumped near Quezon City church

By DJ Yap

THE BODIES OF THREE UNIDENTIFIED men believed to be victims of summary executions were discovered on a street and in front of the Our Lady of Victories Church in Quezon City before dawn yesterday.

The bodies bore stab wounds in the chest and slashes around the neck. Some had also been pounded into their skulls, according to police.

A note with the words "Bebot/Gino/Jhong Salunday" was found atop their bodies, apparently referring to car thieves known to steal parked vehicles by destroying the windshield or forcibly opening the door.

But investigators could not confirm if the murders were actually the work of vigilantes as the note seemed to imply, saying they were still evaluating the evidence.

The bodies were discovered at 3:45 a.m. along Connors Road near the corner of Recto Go Bolinawa Street, Barangay Mariana in New Manila by Mario Pagsinigan, a watchman of Barangay Pinagkaisahan, police said.

Two of the bodies were lying parallel to each other, while the third was placed perpendicular to the others, forming a "L," according to case investigator PO3 Romeo Tandoc Jr.

The first victim was in his late 20s, about 5'2" tall with a small build, fair-complexioned and wearing a white polo shirt and denim pants. The second was in his early 40s, about 5'6" tall with a medium build, and wearing a white T-shirt and denim pants.

The third victim was also in his late 20s, about 5'4" tall with a small build, dark-skinned, wearing a green and black shirt over a white sleeveless top, and sporting the tattooed words "Im or Ate/Commando" on his back.

The bodies were moved to the Prudential Funeral Homes for autopsy until they are identified, police said.

Tandoc said the suspects most likely stabbed the victims to death first before they pounded at least three nails into their heads and slashed their necks.

He added that the victims had probably been killed in another site before these were dumped near the church.

Dolphy grandson faces murder charges for mauling incident

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) is set to file murder charges against a grandson of comedy king Dolphy, who allegedly mauled to death Jeffrey Vergara, a Tondo resident, on Dec. 4.

Investigators at the NBI National Capital Region (NCR) Office said the suspect, Russell Quinco, is reportedly the older brother of Richards Poulo, who was arrested last month at a rehabilitation center in Tagaytay City for allegedly killing a factory worker.

Their father was Wilfredo "Freddie" Quinco, Dolphy's son who passed away last year due to injuries he sustained during a fall.

The NBI-NCR Office headed by Regional Director Ismael Lozada said that the murder charges against two of Quinco's companions, Marlon de la Cruz and an alias "Phillip," in the Manila City Prosecutor's Office.

NBI special investigator Joey Dollete said that according to witnesses, Quinco threw the first punch at Vergara while De la Cruz hit the victim on the head with a beer bottle.

An investigation conducted by the NBI showed that Vergara, who was celebrating his birthday shortly after midnight on Dec. 4, was drinking with friends outside his home when the suspects arrived.

Vergara's common-law wife, Berna Fernandez, told the NBI that Russell and Dan companions provoked the victim.

Then, without any warning, they allegedly began beating up Vergara, who lost consciousness after his head hit the pavement.

Believing that Vergara was only slightly hurt and sleepy after the drinking session, his family waited until the following day before bringing him to the Jose R. Reyes Memorial Medical Center.

Help, however, came too late for the victim who died not too long after the alleged mauling incident.

Motorcycle rams into truck; 1 dead

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

A 27-YEAR-OLD MOTORCYCLE RIDER DIED after his motorcycle rammed into the back of an 8-ton truck carrying boxes of fish early yesterday in Mandaluyong City.

Traffic head Chief Insp. Upiano Romero said the victim, identified as Jessie Williams, was not wearing a helmet when the accident happened.

Truck driver Victorino Felip, 58, voluntarily surrendered to the police after the incident.

Felip told the Inquirer he was driving on the southbound lane of the Crossing Flyover on Shaw Boulevard at about 1 a.m. when the incident occurred. He was on his way to the Monumento Pasig Public Market to deliver boxes of fish.

He said Williams, who lived in the Wack Wack Twin Towers in Mandaluyong City according to the police, was riding his truck on board a Ducati motorcycle.

Because the cars' collision was a sari-sari from the right lane, Williams allegedly tried to overtake the unit but he ended up running into the back of the truck, Inlip added.

The victim sustained major head injuries which killed him instantly, Romero said.

Bunye kin shot dead in drugstore

By Jocelyn R. Uy

A RELATIVE OF PRESS SECRETARY Ignacio Bunye was gunned down by two unidentified men as he was attending to customers in his drug store in Muntinlupa City yesterday.

Virgilio Bunye, 52, sustained three gunshot wounds in the head and body. He was brought to the Muntinlupa Medical Center where he died an hour later.

In his report, PO2 Sherry Ignoso said the suspects were in the front, not Bragoon and General Mercedes on National Road in Barangay Bayanan at 11:30 a.m. yesterday.

They proceeded to buy some medicine but as Bunye's assistant started to give them their change, one of the suspects took out a .45 cal. pistol and shot Bunye.

Police said that the victim was the owner of a piece of land in Ispodac Compound in Barangay Putatan, where a demolition took place last year, displacing 17 families.

Muntinlupa police chief Supt. Jose Mario Espinio told the Inquirer that the dispute over Bunye's property could be behind the killing.

"The victim could have stepped on sensitive toes. The suspects could be among the aggrieved party," the official said.

Hospital vows to help NBI probe of organ donations

By Tina G. Santos

AN OFFICIAL OF A PRIVATE hospital in Quezon City vowed cooperation with the National Bureau of Investigation's probe into the alleged illegal organ donor activities in the institution after a man was arrested last week for reportedly duping a tricycle driver into undergoing a kidney donation.

Atty. Cecilia Custodio, security manager of St. Luke's Medical Center, told the NBI that the hospital was willing to coordinate in the investigation to determine if there were doctors involved in the operation.

Custodio told the NBI that as a normal procedure, "doctors should communicate directly with the donors, no transaction shall be made through a middleman," the added that organ donations are governed by the St. Luke's ethics committee to prevent middlemen from engaging in illegal transactions between donors and recipients.

The hospital turned tools over to say with an affidavit of confession regarding the issue, Custodio said. "This is the first time we learned about middlemen involved in organ donations," he added.

Last week, NBI agents arrested Dionisio Bravante, 45 Upper Bicutan, Taguig, resulting in entrapment operations.

Special Investigator V Joey Huerto of the NBI National Capital Region division, said the suspect was charged with violating Republic Act 8509 (Anti-Trafficking of Persons Act of 2003) in the Taguig Prosecutor's Office.

"Sec. 4. Paragraph G prohibits one to recruit, hire, adopt, transport, or abduct a person by means of a threat or use of force, fraud, deceit, violence, coercion or intimidation for the purpose or removal or sale of organ of a person," Huerto explained.

There were at least four names of donors listed in the suspect's phonebook. "But we have yet to verify the donors' hospital whereabouts," Huerto said. "Depending on the results of our investigation, we could recommend the filing of additional five charges before the Department of Health against any doctor involved in the anomaly."

An investigation showed that the suspect acted as a middleman between the organ recipient and nonphilanthropic Jose Rivero, a 31-year-old tricycle driver from Barangay Lagasan.

The victim was apparently in need of money because he wanted to buy his own tricycle, the NBI added said.

"He was enticed to sell his left kidney because the recipient promised to pay him P300,000, equal from giving him five months

lodging and medicines after the operation," Huerto said. "Everybody also allegedly told Rivero that the operation would take about 30 minutes."

While undergoing tests, something went with problems of rejection, the victim, along with at least six other men who supposedly were also selling their kidneys, stayed in Herminio Jobo house in Taguig from January to October.

While recuperating at the hospital after his operation last Oct. 10, Rivero claimed he saw the wife of the kidney recipient hand over a thick bundle of money to the surgeon.

"The suspect said he would keep the money first because the money was still recovering from

Libya condemns 6 medics to death in AIDS trial

TRIPOLI...SIX FOREIGN MEDICS have convictions by firing squad or hanging after being convicted by a Libyan court on Tuesday of deliberately infecting hundreds of children with the AIDS virus.

The death sentence against the five Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian doctor dismayed the court's foreign observers who gathered with shock and outrage in the international community has with cheers by relatives of the victims.

The defendants—four behind bars for death—burst into tears on hearing the verdict while the families of sick or dead victims celebrated, singing and dancing outside the heavily protected Tripoli court.

Defense lawyer Othman Bouzir told journalists an appeal would be filed before Libya's supreme court within the legal three-week of 60 days, as the last recourse open to the medics.

The accused were charged with infecting 426 children with HIV while they worked at Al-Fateh hospital in the Mediterranean city of Benghazi. More than 50 have since died.

All six had pleaded not guilty.

Bulgaria said it categorically rejected the "absurd" death sentences and called on Libyan authorities to intervene.

"The whole court case was manipulated and covers up the real issue that sparked the AIDS epidemic in Benghazi," said a joint statement by Bulgarian President Georgy Parvanov and Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev.

The European Union presidency condemned the sentence and appealed for clemency, while EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini said he was "shocked" and worried the ruling could damage the between Tripoli and the EU.

The White House said the United States was "disappointed in the verdict."

The medics, first detained in 1999, had already been sentenced in May 2004 to face a firing squad before the supreme court ordered a retrial following a December 2005 appeal.

And Libya's Justice Minister Ali al-Hammaei suggested it may not be the end of the case.

"Tripolitan justice offers the accused the possibility of a complete revision of the case. The supreme court can totally reduce or annul the verdict," he told a press conference.

Christiane Mahieux Vasheron, Valia Georgieva Chervenyakhska, Snezhana Dimitrova, Nasseima Mamdouh Sirageldin and Snezhana Ivanova Dimitrova, were convicted along with the doctor, Ashraf Ahmed Jomaa.

"I am happy with the verdict, which shows the impartiality of the Libyan justice system," Abdullah Wadhaifi, lawyer for the families, told AFP.

The court also ordered the Libyan state to pay the families between $220,000 and $900,000 for each victim.

Initiation carried portraits of dead or sick children outside the courthouse as security forces fired into the air to keep the crowd at bay. "Death to the children killers!" read one banner.

Eight-year-old Nuri al-Orfi on Tuesday became the latest victim to die of the disease, according to a family member, raising the overall death toll to 52.

The case has strained relations between Tripoli and the West in the fourth African state weeks in way back into the international fold after renouncing in 2003 its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Defense lawyers argued that the children had been infected with HIV—the virus that damages the fighting system—before the nurses began working at the hospital.

In November, British medical journal The Lancet ran an editorial entitled "Free the foreign health"—blasted the retrial as a miscarriage of justice with "no legal foundation."

It cited independent scientific evidence that the infections were caused by bad hygiene at the Benghazi hospital, and reports from human rights watchdogs that confessions had been extracted under torture. AFP

NOT TOO OLD FOR CHRISTMAS
Lucia Arias, 91, rocks during a Christmas party at the Sara Zaldibar old people's home in San Sebastian, Dec. 19. –

Palestinians agree to new truce, but violence persists

GAZA CITY—DEADLY VIOLENCE FLARED IN Gaza early Wednesday despite a new ceasefire between rival Palestinian factions to stop a power struggle that is threatening to spin dangerously out of control.

Two Israelis from the Gush Katif settlement bloc were killed in a morning gunbattle with fighters from the ruling Hamas movement overnight after the truce was supposed to come into force from 23:00 GMT (1 a.m. in Middle East) said.

Tension continued to surge in Gaza City with armed men, some of them masked, patrolling the streets, fire in the center of the city, shops were opening until city roadwide continued, with their shutters down for three days of barricades after the fire left 13 people dead and dozens wounded.

After appealing for calm in the escalating road war, both moderate President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniya of Hamas announced a new ceasefire Tuesday.

A previous ceasefire between the factions agreed on Sunday night failed to hold for barely 24 hours, with six people killed in factional fighting in Gaza on Tuesday alone.

Abbas said the new truce had been hammered out after contacts with "friendly countries and friendly leaders," such as Jordan's King Abdullah II.

Officials in Amman had announced earlier that the king had phoned Abbas and offered to host a meeting between him and the Hamas premier to defuse the crisis.

The deadly clashes, which have ruined hours of an unilateral cease-fire declared after Abbas announced on Saturday his intention to call early presidential and parliamentary elections as a way to resolve a months-long standoff with the ruling Islamists.

On Tuesday night, Haniya once again rejected the elections plan.

"This call is unconstitutional and risks throwing us 10 years back. We do not accept, we reject this call and insist on the necessity to respect the choice of the Palestinian people," he said.

Haniya's government has been hamstrung by Israel and the West since it took office in March after a shock election win over Abbas's long-dominant Fatah, plunging the Palestinian territories into their worst financial crisis. AFP

Cheney to testify in CIA leak case

WASHINGTON—VICE PRESIDENT DICK Cheney will be summoned as a defense witness in the trial of his former chief of staff, I. Lewis Libby Jr., on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, a defense lawyer said Tuesday in federal court. A spokesperson for Cheney signaled that he would not resist the request for his testimony.

The decision to call Cheney was announced by Theodore I. Wells, a lawyer for Libby, whom is set to embroiled to begin next month. Cheney has been a looming presence in the CIA leak case from the start, and his appearance as a defense witness would keep the vice president and the White House in the foreground of Libby's trial. Libby is the only person charged with a crime in a month of an investigation into whether anyone in the Bush administration intentionally leaked the identity of a CIA official.

The prospect of Cheney's testimony suggested that Libby's trial could be transformed from a narrowly gauged perjury case into a riveting courtroom drama with the tantalizing vice president at the star witness. He would testify under oath and be exposed to cross-examination by prosecutors.

Cheney would be the first sitting vice president, at least in modern times, to appear as a witness in a criminal trial, said Prof. Joel Goldstein of the St. Louis University Law School, an authority on the vice presidency.

Although Cheney has been a vigorous proponent of executive branch authority, which includes the notion that the president and perhaps other high officials could create exile to testify in criminal trials involving their official activities, his appearance may not set precedents, legal experts said.

That is mostly because the Libby case presents a different situation from one in which such officials are subpoenaed to testify, they said.

Cheney appears to have voluntarily agreed to testify on behalf of Libby, whom he has steadfastly supported. It is unclear whether Cheney would appear personally in the courtroom or seek by testify in a less prominent manner like hosting his testimony taken at the White House and introduced into the trial by videotape.

The trial stems from the disclosure of the identity of Valerie Wilson as a CIA officer in a July 14, 2003, column by Robert D. Novak. The column from that disclosure led to an investigation by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, a special prosecutor, into whether the leak violated any laws and whether Wilson's name was disclosed as part of a campaign to punish her husband, Joseph C. Wilson IV, a foreign ambassador, for his criticism of the White House. NYT

US wants liver, stomach warnings on aspirins

WASHINGTON—U.S. HEALTH OFFICIALS said on Tuesday they want more visible side-effect warnings on the packages of over-the-counter pain relievers such as aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen.

Acetaminophen carries a risk of liver damage, while aspirin and other products called NSAIDs may cause stomach bleeding.

Both acetaminophen carries is only a small fraction of patients, but can be deadly.

The risks have been known for years, but the US food and Drug Administration said new warnings could save consumers money, consumers and reduce deaths and injuries.

"For millions of Americans take over-the-counter drugs to relieve pain every year. FDA officials said the vast majority consumers no problems if they take recommended doses.

Experts worry, however, that people do not realize the dangers of taking too much or combining the medicines with alcohol. Or they may unknowingly use more than one product that contains the same ingredient and accidentally overdose.

"Consumers have so far more regulations of what they're taking for pain relief," said Dr. Charles Ganley, the FDA's director of nonprescription drug products.

But consumer group Public Citizen said the FDA action was "decades late," citing FDA panels that urged new warnings for acetaminophen in 1977 and 1982.

NSAIDs, or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, include aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen and ketoprofen.

The NSAIDs and acetaminophen are available in generic and brand-name versions. Acetaminophen, for example, is the active ingredient in Johnson & Johnson's Tylenol. Wyeth sells ibuprofen under the name Advil. Bayer AG makes aspirin.

The ingredients are available in dozens of over-the-counter pain relievers, as well as some cough and cold remedies. Higher prescription doses are also sold.

Ganley said it was hard to know exactly how many people experience serious side effects from the pain relievers. One manufacturer estimates that about 200 accidental deaths a year were linked to acetaminophen.

A widely cited 1998 study linked NSAIDs to 16,500 deaths per year. Ganley said most of the complications from NSAIDs was attributable to stomach bleeding in patients who take aspirin long-term to prevent heart problems. Reuters

The WORLD

Editor Lorenzo B. Queen

Iraq on brink of collapse, says think-tank

A WOMAN cried, with a windbreak still on it, lies on a mass grave of skeletons after they were unearthed June 2 by forensic experts on a shallow grave in a remote desert north of Baghdad. AFP/FILE

BAGHDAD—IRAQ IS ON THE BRINK OF TOTAL disintegration and could drag its neighbors into a regional war, a leading think-tank said Tuesday, after the Pentagon confirmed violence was at an all-time high.

The warning came amid chaos in Baghdad, where police discovered 33 corpses, including the body of a famous actor, and hunted for kidnapped aid workers and movie executives' wives escaped from jail, allegedly with the help of US hired guns.

The International Crisis Group's report urged Washington to distance itself from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's beleaguered government, which has failed to tackle sectarian militias, and reach out to US arch-foes Iran and Syria.

The permanent members of the UN Security Council and their six neighbors should organize an all-out parley to Iraq's spiraling conflict, it urged, while nevertheless holding out little prospect of success.

"Implementation of the various measures mapped out in this report is not fast opportunity. It is at best a feeble hope," the ICG paper said.

"But it is the only hope to spare Iraq from an all-out disintegration, with catastrophic and devastating repercussions for all," it warned.

The Jordan University's head of operations, Brigadier General Abdel Karim Wahid, told AFP that a high-level investigation had been launched into the capture of Red Crescent staff, the latest in a series of mass kidnaps.

"It was organized, and might be repeated again," he said, linking Tuesday's raid on a Red Crescent office in Baghdad to an abduction-for-ransom operation which netted dozens displaced persons workers.

In both assaults, a huge group of gunmen using security force uniforms, weapons and SUV trucks sealed off a central area of the capital and handed off dozens of civilians, unchallenged by local law enforcement bar.

Iraqi Red Crescent secretary-general Munir Abdullah said that 10 more of the hostages had been released on Tuesday, but revised upwards the number known to have been taken, leaving 18 still unaccounted for.

Mass kidnappings have become the latest signature crime of the vicious war now underway between Baghdad's criminal and sectarian factions, dawning public confidence in the police and coming paramilitaries. AFP

Suicide rate among US soldiers in Iraq rises in 2005

WASHINGTON—THE SUICIDE rate among US soldiers deployed to Iraq increased in 2005 after falling the previous year, according to a study by the US Army.

The study said 22 soldiers serving in Iraq and Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom had committed suicide, compared to 12 in 2004 and 25 in 2003.

The suicide rate was 19.9 per 100,000 in 2005, substantially higher than the rate in 2004, of 10.5 per 100,000.

The majority of the suicides involved "white, unmarried males under the age of thirty" who were enlisted soldiers of a junior rank. The cause of death in most cases was a gunshot wound.

"The study determined that leading suicide risks factors were relationship issues at home and in the unit, followed by legal actions, problems with fellow soldiers and command and duty performance," Jerry Harbour of the US Army Medical Command Public Affairs said in a statement.

The suicide figures were part of a study that looked at the mental health and morale of army soldiers deployed to Iraq. AFP

$2B a week spent on Iraq war

WASHINGTON—US COSTS FOR the Iraq war will exceed $114 billion this fiscal year, approaching the record reached in the prior fiscal year, a top White House official said on Tuesday.

That amounts to more than $2 billion a week spent on the war.

White House budget director Rob Portman, speaking at a roundtable with reporters, also predicted that strong revenue growth would help bring down the overall US budget deficit, allowing some of the spending on Iraq.

Asked if he thought the deficit for fiscal year 2007, which began Oct. 1, would come in below the forecast of $339 billion the White House gave in its mid-year budget snapshot in July, Portman replied, "Yes, I do." The White House previously had predicted an estimate of $338 billion for Iraq war costs in the 2007 fiscal year.

"Our numbers will end up being low," Portman said.

Iraq war spending hit an all-time high of $120 billion in fiscal year 2006 that ended on Sept. 30, from media reports have said the war costs for 2007 could total around $170 billion. But Portman declined to give a precise figure.

The White House is scheduled to unveil its 2008 spending blueprint in early February along with the operating plan, the administration will offer a fresh request for money for the war and will provide updated forecasts for the budget deficit.

Expenditures on the war are escalating even as public support for the conflict falls.

Portman declined to comment on the costs that would be involved if 20,000 additional troops are sent to Iraq in the near future. Reuters

RED SQUARE SKATERS Maria Petrova and Alexey Tikhonov perform during a gala figure skating show in front of St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square on Thursday, Dec. 14. REUTERS

'French had Osama in sight'

PARIS—A DOCUMENTARY SAYS French special forces had Osama bin Laden in their sights seven years before they got their US equivalent, never authorized them to fire.

The French military, however, said that the incidents never happened and the report was "seriously misinformed." The documentary, due to air next year and seen by Reuters on Tuesday, says the troops could have killed the al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan but the order to shoot never came, possibly because it took too long to request it.

"In 2000 and 2001 we had bin Laden in our sights. The sniper said 'I have bin Laden,'" an unnamed French soldier is quoted as saying.

The documentary "Bin Laden, the failings of a manhunt" by filmmakers Emmanuel Amara and Eric de Lauzanne, who have worked for several major French media outlets in Afghanistan, is on the television channel plans to air the documentary in March. Reuters

METRO

Citizen's Call

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INQUIRER

Police arrest 2nd suspect in UK prostitute murders

IPSWICH, ENGLAND—POLICE PUBLICLY identified the killer of five prostitutes arrested a second suspect on Tuesday and seized a van that a neighbor said the suspect had been constantly cleaning.

A senior police prosecutor is held the first suspect, who was arrested Monday for an additional 26 hours while officers scoured his backyard on hands and knees for possible clues.

Detective Chief Superintendent Stewart Gull said both men were suspects in the murders of Tania Nicol, Annett Alderton, Paula Clennell, Gemma Adams and Annette Nicholls. Their naked bodies were found dumped in rural areas of eastern England around Ipswich, 110 km northeast of London, in a 13-day period beginning Dec. 1.

Police have said the first suspect, a 37-year-old man, was arrested Monday in a village outside Ipswich and the second, a 48-year-old man who lived in the town's red-light district, was taken into custody Tuesday. Neither man has been charged or formally identified.

Britain's Press Association and other media outlets identified the second suspect as Steve Wright.

Wright worked as a forklift driver and had lived in the area since September.ABC television reported.

The suspect arrested Monday in Tuesday St. Martin, 37, his southeast of Ipswich, has been identified in news reports as Tom Stephens, 37, a part-time taxi driver and former special police constable, an unpaid volunteer.

He had been quizzed as telling the Sunday Mirror newspaper that he was innocent, but that he knew all four of the victims and had previously been interviewed by police.

"I don't have alibis for some of the times [of the killings], actually I'm not entirely sure I have right alibis for any of the times. But I'm not worried about being charged. I'm innocent," The Sunday Mirror reported him as saying.

Police in white overalls, hoods and face masks were seen in the garden of the home in Tuesday St. Martin, at times on hands and knees probing the ground with gloved fingers.

Pieces of the bodies were found near the main road and the rail line between Ipswich and Felixtow, the two others were discovered near the same road in areas south and southwest of Ipswich.

Clennell, 24, died of compression to her neck, and Alderton, 26, was strangled, a senior pathologist determined. Post-mortem examinations of the bodies of Nicol, 19, and Nicholls, 29, reached no conclusion on the cause of death. AP

S. Koreans the most stressed out people in 10-nation survey

WASHINGTON—SOUTH KOREA HAS BEEN through marked upheaval due to its fast-developing economy, leaving its citizens among its population—with four in five saying they experience stress on a daily basis, AFP/pew polling found.

This starts from a young age, where children spend hours after regular classes in cramming schools to compete on key exams to enter university, the selection of which can affect their entire future career and life, it said.

Years down, they face rising unemployment due to a lack of available jobs, along with rising real estate costs to find a place to live. Public discontent over the poor economic situation has pushed the popularity of President Roh Moo-hyun very low.

In addition to that, the South remains technically at war with North Korea, which recently sealed regional tension with its nuclear test.

South Koreans experienced the highest numbers of people experiencing stress on a daily basis, 81 percent, among 10 nations polled Pew AP figure—including Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain and the United States.

South Korea has experienced big changes in a short period in terms of politics, economics and society compared to other nations," said Jo Hyeong-Rong, a professor of psychiatry at the medical school of Seoul's Yonsei University, adding that this leads to high instances of physical and mental disease.

South Koreans were most likely, 31 percent, to name their jobs as the leading source of stress, followed by finances, named by 28 percent. Workers were likely than women to name their jobs, and more than half of young adults between 18 and 24 named their jobs. AP

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SPORTS

Editor: Teddyboy B. Melendrez

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JASON Castro (left) of Hapee PCU blocks the shot of Al Nazgaroff of Harbour Centre

Juntilla rescues Harbour Centre

By Marc Anthony Reyes

REID JUNTILLA IMPLANTED THE brand of game that belied his name.

The 6-foot-1 guard exploded for 24 points yesterday, including the game-winning basket in the final 2.3 seconds as Harbour Centre stopped Cebuana Lhuillier in Metro Pacific, 75-73, in the 2007 PBL Silver Cup at the Ola-rerte Sports Center.

LAST LAP. Harbour Centre's Reid Juntilla (21) is—that is, drives past Cebuana Lhuillier's Jason Castro (12) in—to give PCU a victory in Cebu.

The willowy Cebuano clinched a second straight for the Bay Masters, who improved to 3-1 and 5-0 overall. The Moneymen fell to 2-2.

Juntilla had earlier banged three offensive, but instead of getting discouraged, even asked that he be given the chance to execute the crucial play.

"He asked for that play so I gave it to him. I knew he could do it," said coach Jeorge Gallent. "Thankfully, he did and hit it."

"I really wanted to make up for my misses and I knew that I could do it," said the 22-year-old veteran in PE-spiritu.

LAAP MVP Kenneth Bono scored a turnaround off an inclusive play against Allan Zambrano for 77-all with less than a minute left.

Harbour called for time and ran-to-him to University of Visayas ace asked Gallent to give him that last play. Juntilla then got away from Emerson Ocbit to deliver the crucial shot.

The Bay Masters steadily climbed from 11 points down in the second quarter to grab the lead at 43-40 through Juntilla, Jerwin Gaco and Al Vergara.

Harbour Centre even stretched its lead to 68-60 in the third before the 6-foot-1 Bono hustled down to work.

Bono, who finished with 17 points, scored eight of his team's last 10 points as he single-handedly earned the right for the Moneymen.

The scores:

First Game

HARBOUR CENTRE 75—CASTRO, Gaco 6, Gallent 2, Villapando 4, Lanting 4, Ocbit 4, Bono 17, Aragon 4, Juntilla 4, Gumabon 2, Acuña 2, Al Vergara 4, Aguilar 5, Bjorkstrom, Augustin 6.

CEBUANA LHUILLIER 73—Rosas 17, Jalos Cano 16, Alcantara 12, Guiuan 8, Sta-E. Escalona 5, Tesoro 4, Cuevas 2, Cortez 2, Sotelo 2, Mendoza 2.

Quarters: 16-25, 40-40, 64-60, 75-73.

Pacman heads PSA contenders

FROM MANNY "PACMAN" PACQUIAO, Roberto Alcazaren to Lyn Ontolan, just about everybody who made 2008 a banner year for Philippine sports stands in a strong contender for Athlete of the Year honors.

The three, along with eight others, are the frontrunners for the top award to be handed out by the Philippine Sportswriters Association in its Annual Awards night next month.

Pacquiao, arguably the best fighter of the four years, or, again, in contention for the award along with shooter and fellow con artist Rhea Santos, bowler Biboy Rivera, fencer and Athens Mr. Everest conqueror Peter Evasco and Bonz Gotladera and Cebu Asian Games gold medalists Antonio Gabica, Jean Tipon, Violito Payla and Rene Catalan.

Lyn Ontolan, the surprise gold medalist in the Women's Individual Archery event at the Beijing Olympics, is also in the running for the award.

Last year, Team Philippines was the recipient of the PSA's highest award after emerging as overall champion for the first time ever in the Southeast Asian Games.

This is the first time in many years that there is a big list of contenders vying for the Athlete of the Year award. It's a clear proof that Philippine sports is at very much alive," said PSA president Jimmy Gatus.

The 28-year-old Pacquiao, voted as Athlete of the Year from 2003-06, won all his three fights this year including two sensational knockout victories over legendary Mexicans warrior Erik Morales.

Alcazaren's bid is bolstered by his inspiring triumph in the World Bowl Championship held in the country for the first time last month.

Gatus up for dead after losing his first two matches in the group stages, the 34-year-old cagefighter from Caloocan, Laguna, made it to the knockout stage in the last minute and went on a roll, beating seeded players along the way and capping his Cinderella story with an 17-11 upset of former champion Gil Vasquez in the finals.

Rivera was among those whom Alcazaren defeated in the World Bowl finals en route to his first ever gold. Gilbert Rull of Russia is making a strong case for himself on account of his sparkling all-event to the inaugural World Cup of Pool in South Africa, the San Miguel Asian Pool Tour and the BT World 8-Ball Championship in Las Vegas.

In winning the Solid title in the tournament of champions Western Shorts, Payla won $500,000, the biggest ever purse prize in the history of the sport. Rivera was the recipient of the athlete of the Year award in 1999 and 2001.

Rivera is the latest bowler to contend for the award following his scintillating triumph in the World Masters Bowling Championship in Busan, South Korea.

RIP: Arda: Lasting legacy

Golf great Bantam Ben Arda dies, 77

By Mussing R. Cardilla

BEN ARDA, THE FORMIDAT Filipino pro in the '50s and '70s, passed away yesterday due to a lingering illness. He was 77.

A former caddy at the Cebu Country Club, the 5-foot-5 Arda emerged from the shadow of contemporaries Pepe Gervacio, Dave Dellosa and Tagaytay Tigers to become the first king of Philippine fairways in the 1960's Rosberg Era.

He won the Philippine Open three times (1961, 1963 and 1970) and went on to become Asia's top pathfinder by capturing the Asian Golf Circuit championship, now known as the Asian Tour's Order of Merit, in 1978.

He was the first Filipino to qualify for the US Masters and British Opens and played with American stars Billy Casper and Arnold Palmer in the Merdo Golf Club leg of Shell's Wonderful World of Golf series in 1969.

A veteran of many World Cup campaigns, Arda and Tagay were selected to the Philippine Sportswriters Association to its Hall of Fame on Jan. 9, 2004.

After his retirement, Arda became a match-sought coaching guru and a product answer-spend his post-calling that he never-tired and seasoned golf-tyrants before he became a top-able holder at the shifting Country Club driving range.

Alabang golf course manager Cuby Concillado said yesterday that Arda suffered another stroke on his way to the driving range Tuesday morning and died at the same Alabang clinic. He body-lies in state at the Holy Trinity Chapel in Alabang. Interment details will be announced later.

Pacquiao-Barrera looms bigger

A POSSIBLE MANNY PACQUIAO-MARCO Antonio Barrera rematch looms bigger by the day as other alternative match-ups have either yet to be firmed up or are not altogether possible.

The other day, Japan's Akihiro Honda revealed that his fighter, two-spoiled-and World Boxing Association (WBA) super featherweight champion Ricardo Valdez, is not yet ready to face Pacquiao in 2007, effectively putting to rest speculations that Pacquiao may face Valdez in Macao this March.

Yesterday, the camp of Juan Manuel Marquez announced that a fight with Barrera has not yet been declined, giving rise to the possibility that, indeed, the Filipino icon might face Barrera next.

Ignacio "Nacho" Beristain, who trains and manages Marquez, told Boxingscene.com that Golden Boy Promotions, which promotes both Barrera and Marquez, has yet to call him about a possible showdown between the two

PACQUIAO

BARRERA

reactions.

"We have not yet been contacted by Golden Boy Promotions about a fight with Marco Antonio Barrera. It is a fight we welcome, but we have not heard a thing," Beristain said. "We take it all in speculation," Hermosa added.

Barrera versus Marquez is the alternative fight being put on the table should a Pacquiao-Barrera bout does not materialize.

The Filipino ring icon is currently embroiled in a legal tussle between Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions and Top Rank's Bob Arum after the ground-for-ground superstar signed both contracts promised to him by the two warring promoters.

However, recognized trainer Freddie Roach, who considerable an unanimous respect from Pacquiao, has indicated that Golden Boy presents the best opportunity for Pacquiao and a Barrera fight is the biggest available for this Filipino southpaw.

Meanwhile, Beristain also revealed in the same interview that should an opportunity present for him to train Oscar De La Hoya for his After 5 bout with Ricky Hatton/Juan Manuel Marquez, he would not hesitate to do the job. "not for the money, but for the honor of working with a fighter of Oscar's caliber."

Roach, who is also in the running to be De La Hoya's next trainer, would not be considered for comment as he is currently in Cebu, Jessica Dy.

So stuns Dimakiling, grabs solo lead

Individual standings (Open section):
4.5 points—IM Stanley Ti; **4** points—GM Mark Paragua, GM Nelson Mariano I, IM Jayson Gael, IM John Paul Gomez, IM Ricardo Calma, **3.5 points**—GM Oliver Barbosa, IM Jonathan Tan, FM Jan Emmanuel Garcia, FM Jan Emmanuel Sunas, FM Jan Emmanuel Ignacio, IM John Joseph de Guzman, NM Yusuf Nuesa, NM Paolo Valenzona, Jayson Jubio, Paulo Lorenzo Antonio

BEING JUST NINETY SO SHORT fellow grandmaster-candidate Oliver Dimakiling in the fourth round yesterday afternoon spent the solo lead in the 2nd Step Pangasinan Open Championship and Chess Club hinge at the SM City in Manila.

So, the youngest Filipino IM at 11, prevailed with white after 61 pushes of a Philidor Defense to post his fourth straight victory in as many rounds. "I'm just lucky to have Rizza Oliver Dimakiling," said so his Filipino. "It's hard to tell what will happen in this tournament because the scores are close."

"His improvement is a good preparation for my stint in the Singapore Masters starting Dec. 26," said Ito, who got his first GM result in Badminton, Germany last month.

Ito, who lost 1923-1768 head coach Raymond Salcedo in the third round, is scheduled to face top-seeded GM Mark Paragua in the fifth-round evening session.

WESLEY SO

The 21-year-old Paragua, the country's top-ranked player with an Elo of 2567 beat IM Bernardo Roco in the third round then halved the point with fellow GM Nelson Mariano Ong in the fourth round.

Paragua is also scheduled to face his other Singapore Masters.

Mariano, the former Asian junior champion, beat National Master Becky Ouano in the third round.

Paragua and Mariano raised their total to 4.5 points and climbed into a tie for 2nd to 6th players with IM Jayson Gayle, Feb Master John Paul Gomez, IM Oliver Barbosa.

Gayle, 20, who finished eighth in the rapid competition of the 15th Asian Games in Doha, drew with Gomez in the third round then toppled NM Rolando Sidle in the fourth round. Gomez, 22, shocked IM Vim Rabuka in the fourth.

Barbosa, on the other hand, outplayed NM Jonathan Guinto in the third then spun IM Richard Bitoon in the fourth, in this six-day event.

In the Challengers section, five rain-beaters shared top spot with 4.0-point reach. They are Meshon Krupnik, Adrian Mesiagmo, Mikee Miranda, Manuel Sy and Shubon Khaefel. Marlon Bernardino

ANTONIO Asistio
Lower-tier amateury keeps himself centered for the PGP Aviation championship.

SPORTSWATCH

Jungolf anniversary tilt at Riviera

THE SIXTH ANNUAL ANNIVERSARY TOURNAMENT WILL BE HELD TOMORROW at the golfing country course of The Riviera Golf & Country Club and Riviera Sports Village, Cavite. A shotgun start at 8:30 a.m. first tee is scheduled for the Jungolf Tournament. B, C, D and above at Riviera Couples and Classes E and F at the Riviera Sports Club. The top three finishers in each division will accumulate and other special prizes. Entry fees are P1,000 for alumni and P500 for juniors. Please call 883-9600 or 0917-888-1026. Memorable Pegma de Guzman recently passed their turtle 2006 Singlebroom Junior Masters tournament.

Cainta cockfest draws 110 entries

ABOUT 110 SMALLTIME COCKERS AND BREEDERS OF FOUL ARE MEETING Manila counterpart today at Cainta Cockers Club at the Rizal Festival Wire Cock Coliseum. Derby starts at 1 p.m. Bout fees are reasonable for the juniors at P1,000 and minimum cost P5,000. The hosted side champions will receive P40,000 plus a brand new motorcycle worth P40,000, while the winning fanciers and cockpits will receive P7,000 and P20,000, respectively. For the second place, P30,000 and brand-new motorcycle (the handler and quiffer will receive P4,000 each) P15,000, respectively. The third to fifth players will also receive prizes. The first 10 winners (and not 11 winners will get P1,000 each as bonus for inquiries, contact 533-3234, 240-0911 or 0928-429-9111 (Arnold Amores). Also slated at 2PM is the Silver Star Encounter 9-Cock Derby entries. 29 with a guaranteed prize of P400,000 and second new motorcycle for the hosted 4th champion. Entry fee is P11,000 and minimum bet P5,000.

Fastest Win event at Las Piñas today

THE FASTEST WIN SMALL-COCK TOURNAMENT TAKES CENTER STAGE AT LAS Piñas Coliseum today with more than 150 participants from Muntinlupa, Parañaque, Pasay City, Las Piñas, Bacoor, Cavite and Laguna taking part. Play starts at 9:30 a.m. Eight-man elimination, according to hosts Bobot Fuentes, Mandog Bucaneg and Bernie Silva. The finished win elimination will be selected after every 120 fights, and each receives P10,000 while the second and third places get P5,000 each, to a random two-opponent. All participants qualify up to Battle to the Death Hour 4-cock derby on later day with combined main prizes. The first 10 winners get paid P1,000 each at noon for inquiries, contact 553-3234, 240-0911 or 0928-429-9111 (Arnold Amores). Also slated at 2PM is the Silver Star Encounter 9-Cock Derby entries. 29 with a guaranteed prize of P400,000 and second new motorcycle for the hosted 4th champion. Entry fee is P11,000 and minimum bet P5,000.

Salpukan derby resumes Saturday

THE BLOODIEST WITH THE COCK TRIBUNGON SALPUKAN COCK DERBY TOURNEY at Makati Coliseum this Saturday featuring the fifth round elimination. Fifty participants will battle it out, while the remaining 68 entries compete on Dec. 31. All qualifiers (1, 1-1, 2, 2-1 and 3 entries) will clash on Dec. 30. Out of 161 entries and breeders who saw action, 93 have reached the finals and automatic berths in the Dec. 31 showdown. Derby opens on Saturday's round over Tony Lucas, Dino Santos, Jun So Nuevas and SPOR action. Jackpot prize is P2 million, according to promoters Chi Delfaca, Rudy Sanso and Williams Co of MT. Sports and Amusement Corp. For reservation of entries, call 895-3641 and 895-8411 (Jason or Stephanie).

Asistio, other seeds rip foes; Piccio tumbles

By Manong B. Castillo

CAMILIANO, LAGUNA—THREE-TIME PBA with Inter-Isle amateur winning top seed Asistio and fourth-seeded action had Dipsea U and 4, partnership to barge into the second round of the BF Aviation championships' match play stage at the exclusive, The Country Clubhere.

The former Philippine pool member handily encountered problems in handling out the Del Monte mainstay Dipsea, but the top seed is hailed' play, the possibility and bubbly Mia Pineda, was elected to close by an unknown lure.

Pitcio, runner-up to Frances finished last year in Baroloal, lost 1-up to Ting Ting Cue, who survived the qualifying by the skin of her teeth.

Joy Bayton, the No. 2 seed, was also unforgiving in handing out Anne Gomez teammate Dina Bonello, 4-3, after having a protracted quarterfinal clash with Marivic Dumandan-Abbas.

Dumandan, the 28-year-old whose mom) fed is long overdue to win this event, had an early time against Lorenza Palongpon, 3-and-4, to move up against the dangerous Joyce Tordagonia, the former Considering Open champ in the second-seed Ferrer Cadiliter Open winner Jared Abalos, 2-and-1.

Bayton next tangles with Edmund Au of Makiwala, a 1-up winner over longtime Marvel Payao even as Ramos's Ilan Chong-Just took out No. 2 Louie Bacudao, 3-and-2, to earn a second round clash with Michael Bilon.

Defense winner of the individual heroes in the Zobia Asian Games, still grasped his form but still found a way to take out Shubert Bilon-Santos, 2-up, third Alice Bulan of Malaysia edged Ismail de Villa, 1-up; Melissa Loh of Singapore, who outdrawed Chihiro Ikeda of Japan, 3-up, after 19 holes; and Asian Games' Asian Singapore, who scored a collapsed win over Lisa Roberts.

Lapid, 20, who finished eighth in the rapid competition of the 15th Asian Games in Doha, drew with Gomez in the third round then toppled NM Rolando Sidle in the fourth round. Gomez, 22, shocked IM Vim Rabuka in the fourth.

Barbosa, on the other hand, outplayed NM Jonathan Guinto in the third then spun IM Richard Bitoon in the fourth, in this six-day event.

In the Challengers section, five rain-beaters shared top spot with 4.0-point reach. They are Meshon Krupnik, Adrian Mesiagmo, Mikee Miranda, Manuel Sy and Shubon Khaefel. Marlon Bernardino

San Andres climbing motocross zenith fast

IF ANYTHING, THE RECENT 2006 Supercross International Championship Series affirmed Ronnell San Andres' status as motocross' bizarre supremo.

The 16-year-old San Andres, who has reaped accolades from both the Philippine Sportscaster Association (PSA) and the Sports Commissioners Organization of the Philippines (Scorp), finished second to three-time teammate Glenn Aguilar in both the Pro Open and 99cc 125 divisions of the championships.

But what makes the feat all the more impressive is the fact that San Andres took part in the premier pro-open and 125 classes for the first time, making the big jump from the kiddies' categories into the big league only this year.

"Ronnell has shown that he belongs with motocross' top guns," said Ronnell's father Jun San, himself a winner of the Supercross' Wayward Class of the series sanctioned by the National Motorcycle Sports and Safety Association (Namsa). "He first is amazing because he even equipped many of the grizzled veterans who are almost twice his age."

SAN ANDRES

San Andres' rapid rise can be attributed to the training he underwent last year under famed coach and former world motocross champion Jim Gibson.

But the elder San Andres said it's more than just Jim's chair schooling.

"Ronnell's inherent riding skills and the kind of learning that a infused into him are a given. What really makes him a cut above the rest is his dedication to his craft.

"You don't have to push him to train, he knows what to do and that makes him extra special," said Jun proud.

San Andres, a member of Manila Central University who is backed by Cullen Bevies, Dakley, MC Helmet, Bridgestone Tires, KTM, Pro, Sta, Nenibal, Alpine Star, Answer, Inside Racing and JBI Motorcycle Parts and Accessories, is currently the only one of the motocross scene's most anticipated stars in 2007.

"This season is an awesome experience for Ronnell because he was, at first, able to keep up with the pros. Soon, he's here one of them," added Jun's dad.

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Passive Guiao, fiery Barakos

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN ACT OF peace—the "sit down" strike staged by Red Bull coach Yeng Guiao during the Red Bull-Purefoods game at the Araneta Coliseum last Sunday.

The protest was against the Dec. 2 memo issued by PBA commissioner Noli Eala to all PBA teams severely restricting the professional conduct on court of players and coaches like Yeng.

IN HUDDLE

Beth Cielo

"That unnecessary incident was not necessary. As it is, the officials already have so much power," Yeng had commented on the eve of the game.

The new guidelines stated that any such as running up and down the sidelines after a call or non-call, making faces over disputed calls, shouting with or without invectives, incessant clapping or pointing at an official, among others, will be dealt with more severely from thereon.

"I'll do exactly as he wants," Yeng said. "Let's see if the spectators don't do of boredom."

Yeng disclosed that he had designated one of his assistants to keep a close tab on him—to note him in so to speak—in cases that he accomplishes what he set out to do.

Yeng, despite supportive abs o stopped, grew instinctively. I need somebody to remind me once in awhile."

Yeng had also advised his players not to misinterpret his strange demeanor.

"I explained to them that even if I look and are passive and indifferent, it does not mean that I'm disinterested in the game. I told them to play their hearts out. Regardless of how I behave, fulfill to as double, this is just my way of adhering to the new memorandum."

True enough, Yeng was practically motionless during last Sunday's game, as he kept his hands glued to the bench. In the guys pounding his lips. He maintained a completely blank expression on his face practically all game long.

The Sunday's win, 112-92.

* * *

The day after, I called Yeng in congratulate him on his victory and his successfully carrying out his resolve. Although his assistant had claimed that he stood up twice, he said he remembered doing it only once, when another fracas between Topex Robinson and Roger Yap threatened to erupt.

How did it feel to be in a straight jacket?

"I felt different, I felt weird. It wasn't me. Because everything was bottled up, I felt that I just might suddenly explode," Yeng said.

He admitted though, that there was an upside to the whole exercise.

"Hopefully ang maging effect. Mapraho ang game, mapanalo ang lare ng team. Siyempre dahil mas relaxed ang players," he said.

Incidentally, Yeng's Thirdeen were scheduled to go up against Sawyngo Gindora in the main game of the day's doubleheader.

If the players are responding well to the "new" Yeng, he feels he ought to retain the new persona.

"I'm not concerned with the effect now," he said. "Baka nakagawa kailangan ng ibang style naman."

* * *

After last Sunday's game, the players were each escorted outside the premises by security men.

Despite loitering by the courtside area and the way to prevent another scuffle among the players who had a heated confrontation during the game.

Other habitués however believe that assigning security men to each player was a measure of preventing them to pickpockets who get addicted to that area.

"Kasi nga noong nakakakuha na play-on recently, nawawalan ng wallet, cellphone," said a player again. "Talk 'n' Text's Don Allado is the latest victim."

The players should be warned that the pickpockets are now operating in Ilocos. Blas Ople, a groupof Nine on Five, nga inilalo pa, would be requesting for a phone-to-mobile, upon nakapin po ni pagpalo ng player. Hindi na nila mapigilan ang nakakainis sila," exclaimed the mother of a cager.

* * *

While we're on the subject, should I perhaps warn players, coaches and other cage celebrities about strange text messages being received by their colleagues?

For example, my number appeared in a couple of text messages sent to a PBA coach and a team's liaison officer. I sent neither and was so surprised how my number could have appeared in the messages.

They say the culprit could be a virus or CHIKKA.

Quezon City honors Gabica, pledges support

FROM left: Councilor Jeric Imson, Antonio Gabica, Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr., Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista and Councilors Diosdado Almonte, Boyet Hipol and Rony Malonzo

FOR BRINGING HONOR TO THE COUNTRY, particularly Quezon City, the Quezon City council and employees honored Team Gilas hero Antonio Gabica on Monday.

The 34-year-old Gabica, winner of the 9-ball singles event and other medals at the 15th Asiad, was feted by Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr., Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista, Majority Floor Leader and 4th District Councilor Jerik Imson and Councilor Boyet Hipol during the flag-raising ceremony in front of the City Hall.

"You made me and the Quezon City very proud for our country the Philippines as a whole," Belmonte told Gabica, who is residing in the 4th District in Teacher's Village. "You showed to our Asian neighbors that Filipinos can excel in any sports arena."

"His outstanding performance in billiards event, supporting gold and silver, gave us an ungrateful honor to Quezon City," added Belmonte.

Gabica was accompanied by his wife Jean, Bagis promotion head businessman/sportsman Celerino "Terry" Mariano and BFL's Donal Pardo Magbalot. Jerun, for his part, said Gabica is a product of good and comprehensive sports management program.

Also in the honorarium

RP athletes did good job–Keon

By Mars Anthony Reyes

IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE PHILIPPINES' best Asian Games finish in 44 years, but the Philippine Olympic Committee has yet to make its verdict whether the country met its expectations in Doha recently.

POC spokesman Joey Romasanta said the POC executive board is still in the process of determining what standard will be used to gauge the recent Doha performance of four gold, six silver and nine bronze medals.

"Where do we stand? If Doha was a success against our previous performance in Busan or according to our target at the start of the Games?" said Romasanta.

He said the POC executive board will come up with an "organized assessment" of the Games after many other factors are considered.

"We will see how we did wrong or what we did right," Romasanta added.

KEON

He said the POC will use the Asian Games experience to chart the course to a first Olympic gold medal in Beijing in 2008.

Meanwhile, former Gilas Pilipinas skipper and 2005 Southeast Asian Games training chief Mike Eroa said the country "did a pretty good job" in Qatar.

"Considering that the Asian Games is such a big league and is virtually world class already, the Philippines' winning four golds, six silvers and nine bronzes is a pretty good performance," Eroa told The Bulletin.

Eroa noted that the Chinese team which handily won the overall title with 165 golds, had in its roster players of "white caucher."

"For a country that is so nationalistic, they are humble enough to admit that their local coaches are not adequate," Eroa said. "We can also do it here."

MisOr forces playoff

CEBU CITY—4-KILOmiss Peyee Pharmacist's forceful rebounding-all fanne Three of the MI. Kisses Pedido Mindoro/Aloipen Basketball Association (MVBA) Second Conference by shooting M. Distillery Events Bohol-Cebu City, 98-89, at the New Cebu City Coliseum Tuesday. The action is now even at 1-1.

From the onset, it seemed the Jewelers of Michel J. Distillery and Coach Saul D. Alcantara were all set to take home their second straight MVBA championship, outwilling the first three periods and leading by as many as 11 points, 64-53, late in the third quarter. Adding to the woes of the smash of MVBA, eight-time All star Gilbert Demape, 6'6 Gym Ilonga and Dondon Mendoza, fearing forward Jun Sulerme is also outmuscled playing time to his role players. That was until disaster struck in the part of M. Distillers.

M. Distillery's stars Capacete pumped the coop with a fitful goal, 75-67. Suddenly, Mister went on a 19-0 run led by the two triples of Bonby Sanchez plus another six markers from Jay Portillo thus giving them the lead entering the last two minutes, 86-75.

Mike Hortigo cycled Mister's run with a basket at the 1:51 mark.

RP rises to 171 in Fifa rankings

THE PHILIPPINES CONTINUED its rise in world football this month, jumping 12 places in the year-end rankings released by the International Football Federation (Fifa).

From 184 in November, the Filipinos are now ranked 171, after ranking up 41 ranking points for their breathtaking finish in the Asean Football Championship. Qualified sides will be in bold.

The Philippines has moved up 24 places in the past two months.

After losing 1-2 against Laos, the Nationals won three straight matches, including two against previously higher ranked opponents, allowing them to nail a spot to the Asean Championships scheduled next month in Bangkok and Singapore.

Most importantly, the Philippines—or host, until the end of the year—no longer holds the worry distinction as the lowest Asia-ranked team, after newcomer Timor Leste.

The Philippines, now ranked seventh in the region, is even one rung higher than powerhouse Vietnam and two steps of Cambodia. Brunei is second-worst at 174, while Timor-Leste remained at 198.

Singapore stayed on top of the region at 111, followed by Thailand at 127.

Meanwhile, Laos, the top team in the Asean Qualifiers with four wins, registered 106 points to be at 151, just ahead of Malaysia (152), Indonesia (153) and Myanmar (154).

Philippine Football Federation president Jose Miguel Bautista expressed delight over the rankings, the country's best since December 2004. Two months earlier the country stood at its worst position at 195.

"We are still the underdogs in the next tournament but at least we were better a team that has learned how to win and will be confident when they step into the field," Bautista said. He hopes to the tournament will be very tough."

The Philippines, which defeated Brunei, Cambodia and Timor Leste in qualifying, has been grouped with three-time winner Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar in the Asean Championships, which stakes $100,000 to the champion squad.

Codell F. Fajon, Inquirer Visayas

RECORD-SETTER: Real Spicy streaks past Empire King in the final stretch en route to a record-setting victory in the 55th PCSO Presidential Gold Cup held Sunday at the Santa Ana Park. Real Spicy's 11th straight victory for the year was worth P1.3 million for proud owners Jose Catherine Figueroa and wife Maine, who accepted the Presidential Gold Cup and the giant check from PCSO chair Sergio Valencia (left), who was joined by PCSO Commissioner Rodolfo Bulseco and PRC president and CEO Solomon Cua.

SPORTS

Suns win club-record 15th straight game

PHOENIX—AMARE STOUDEMIRE dominated with 28 points and 10 rebounds in 28 minutes, and the Phoenix Suns downed the Toronto Raptors, 115-98, to set a franchise-record 15th consecutive victory in the NBA on Tuesday.

The Suns try to extend the NBA's longest winning streak in seven seasons against Denver on Wednesday with the Nuggets possibly holding Allen Iverson, whom they surprised in a trade with the Philadelphia 76ers (see related story below).

Stoudemire was 11-for-14 from the field and ran out the final 13 minutes to arguably his most impressive outing since he returned after missing all but three games of last season following microfracture knee surgery.

Steve Nash had 14 points and 15 assists in three quarters for Phoenix, which hasn't lost since an overtime setback at Utah on Nov. 16. He then rested. Double figures on Tuesday, Shawn Marion scored 17, Leandro Barbosa 15, Raja Bell 13 and Boris Diaw 12.

The Suns broke the franchise record of 14 straight set Dec. 1-30, 1992. The 15-game streak is the longest in the NBA since the Los Angeles Lakers won 19 in a row from Feb. 4 to March 12, 2000.

T.J.Ford scored 19 for Toronto before leaving in the fourth quarter with a bruised knee bank. Top draft pick Andrea Bargnani 16 for the Raptors.

Phoenix led by 27 in the third quarter, when coach Mike D'Antoni began to rest his regular starters and go to his bench.

At Chicago: Luol Deng scored 23 points and tied a season-high with 13 rebounds, and the Bulls won for the 12th time in 13 games, topping the LA Lakers, 94-89.

Ben Gordon hit two free throws to close out the win with 50.9 seconds left, after Smush Parker cut the Bulls' lead to three with a foul shot and a dunk in the final 40 seconds. Deng hit 8-of-16 shots, and Gordon scored 22 as Chicago won its fifth straight.

Kobe Bryant was a non-factor for Los Angeles after scoring a combined 94 in the previous two games. He was content to defer and finished with 19 points on 8-of-18 shooting. Swaun Brown went right at Chicago's Ben Wallace, scoring 16 points and grabbing 12 rebounds, and Parker scored 14. AP

NBA TODAY ON BASKETBALL TV

9 a.m.—Memphis at San Antonio (replay 8 p.m. 4 p.m.).

KOBE BRYANT finds the lane crowded as he goes for a drive. AP/CBS

76ers deal Iverson to Denver Nuggets

IVERSON

PHILADELPHIA—Allen Iverson was traded by the 76ers to the Denver Nuggets on Tuesday, ending the disgruntled NBA All-Star era of Philadelphia after 10 years.

The four-time scoring champion was given to the Nuggets in exchange for Andre Miller, Joe Smith and two 2007 first-round picks. The Nuggets also get Ivan Ukrilevitch.

The trade comes one day after Nba scoring leader Carmelo Anthony of the Nuggets was suspended for 15 games because of a weekend brawl between the Nuggets and New York Knicks. Iverson now takes his 31.3 scoring average to Denver and ends his turbulent tenure with the franchise that made him the No. 1 selection to the NBA 1996 draft.

"I'm very happy about the trade," Iverson said in an e-mailed statement. "Denver's style of play fits my strengths. I'm looking forward to playing with Carmelo, the rest of the Denver Nuggets and for (coach) George Karl, who is a proven winner."

Iverson, a seven-time All-Star, immediately the Blazers from lottery tracts to postseason, though he wouldn't win an NBA title. He came close in 2001, when the 76ers lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA finals, but since then the team has fallen from the elite, reaching the playoffs twice in the last three seasons. AP

Federer improves yet again in 2006

GORDON...FOR ROGER FEDERER, to do any better next year, he'll need to win everything.

The world's top-ranked tennis player had another incredible year in 2006, winning three Grand Slams and the season-ending Masters Cup.

The only major title Federer has yet to win—the French Open—is within reach, too. The Swiss star made the final for the first time but lost to defending champion Rafael Nadal.

"To finish this season off by winning the Masters Cup, the world championship so to speak, it's the perfect ending to an incredible season," Federer said. "There's not much more I could have done."

Federer has been ranked No. 1 since Feb. 2, 2004, and already has enough points to ensure he'll break Jimmy Connors' record of 160 consecutive weeks atop the ATP rankings by the end of February. Only two players (Nadal and Andy Roddick) have broken into the top 10.

He finished the season with 12 titles in 16 finals appearances from his 17 tournaments, winning $8.34 million.

Nadal also had a stellar year. He also winning the French Open for the second consecutive year and losing to Federer in the Wimbledon final. The 20-year-old Spaniard set a record for consecutive wins on clay. The win over Federer in the Paris final was his 60th in a row, dating to April 2005.

The women's game continued to show that all the top players can win, but Amelie Mauresmo finally emerged as a threat to win on all surfaces.

The Frenchwoman, who had reached only one Grand Slam final before 2006, won the Australian Open and Wimbledon, and lost to Justine Henin-Hardenne in the final of the WTA Championships.

"I will look back on my season and say I would have signed for it any time if you told me 'I were going to get two Grand Slams titles,'" Mauresmo said.

Henin-Hardenne reached the finals at all four Slams—the first woman to achieve that since Martina Hingis in 1997—but went only her second straight French Open for her fifth major title. She finished No. 1 for a second time. AP

College-bound Wie gets into Stanford

THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA—MICHELLE Wie has been accepted into Stanford University and is planning on entering the school Tiger Woods attended.

The 17-year-old said on Tuesday she would enroll in the college and was dispelling any talk she would concentrate exclusively on her professional golf career once she finished high school in Hawaii.

"No one really believed me," Wie said from Orlando, Florida, where she is working with swing coach David Leadbetter. "Time that I get into Stanford, it was one of my dreams, and I want to go through with it...I definitely want to go there and really try to graduate."

Wie has been raising school and golf since she played three LPGA Tour events at age 12. She turned professional in October 2005 and earned close to $2M million this year from endorsements, earnings and appearance money overseas.

Wie will not be eligible to play US college golf.

Told that Tiger Woods turned only two years at Stanford before he turned pro, she said, "Hopefully, I'll last a little longer."

Wie has been one of the top headliners in women's golf the since she became the youngest US Girls' Amateur champion at adult events by winning the US Women's Amateur Public Links in 2005 at 15. AP

IN THIS ISSUE

- **Nonoc mine talks hit** snag over ownership /B2
- **BIR says 2006 target** unrealistic, wants it cut to P601.4B /B5

BUSINESS

Editor Raul G. Marcelo • Assistant Editor Connie S. Martinez

Neda says economy to grow 5.7% in 2007

BLENDED: Leaders have warned that the continuing downward spiral in the quality of education will peak in 5 to 6 years, while the Department of Education wants to address the problem early on, or at the pre-school and nursery levels.

Education crisis seen to peak in 5 years

By Desiree L. Lasay

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ONGOING "crisis" in the local education system will be felt fully in five to six years with the business community having to shoulder the brunt of the costs.

This was the warning aired by the Philippine Business for Education (PBEd) advocacy group, which the other day unveiled its five-point priority agenda to arrest the "downward spiral" in the quality of education in the country.

Among other things, the group wants to "adopt global standards" by lengthening the basic education cycle from the present 10

EDUCATION B3

Downplays concerns on US economic slowdown

By Michelle V. Rarra

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT Authority has downplayed concerns that the expected slowdown of the US economy next year would dampen exports and overall growth of the Philippine economy.

In its yearend briefing yesterday, the Neda stressed that the Philippines' export markets were already well diversified and a slack in demand by American consumers would not significantly hurt Philippine export earnings.

"It is not correct to say that we are highly dependent on the United States. Our exports already have many growth drivers," said Dennis Arroyo, Neda director for policy and planning.

The Neda has projected that exports would outrun in 2007 the double-digit growth seen this year, forecasting a 10.5-percent rise year-on-year.

As of the first 10 months of this year, exports grew 16.4 percent to $30.32 billion from a year ago, much better than the 10-percent full-year growth target. The growth was largely attributed to the huge global demand for electronics.

Arroyo said exports would be one of the growth drivers for the Philippine economy next year. The Neda is aiming to hit a target that the economy would grow by at least 5.9 percent next year.

The official also said the Neda was keeping its 2006 projection of an economic growth of at least 5.5 percent. In the first three quarters of the year, the economy grew 5.4 percent year-on-year.

Arroyo noted that gains were the days when the United States accounted for bulk of the Philippines' export earnings. While the United States is still the Philippines' biggest export market, its contribution to the total export

NEDA B3

CURRENCIES

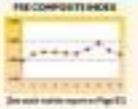
DECEMBER

49.273 ▲ 1

As of 9 p.m., Dec. 20, 2006

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



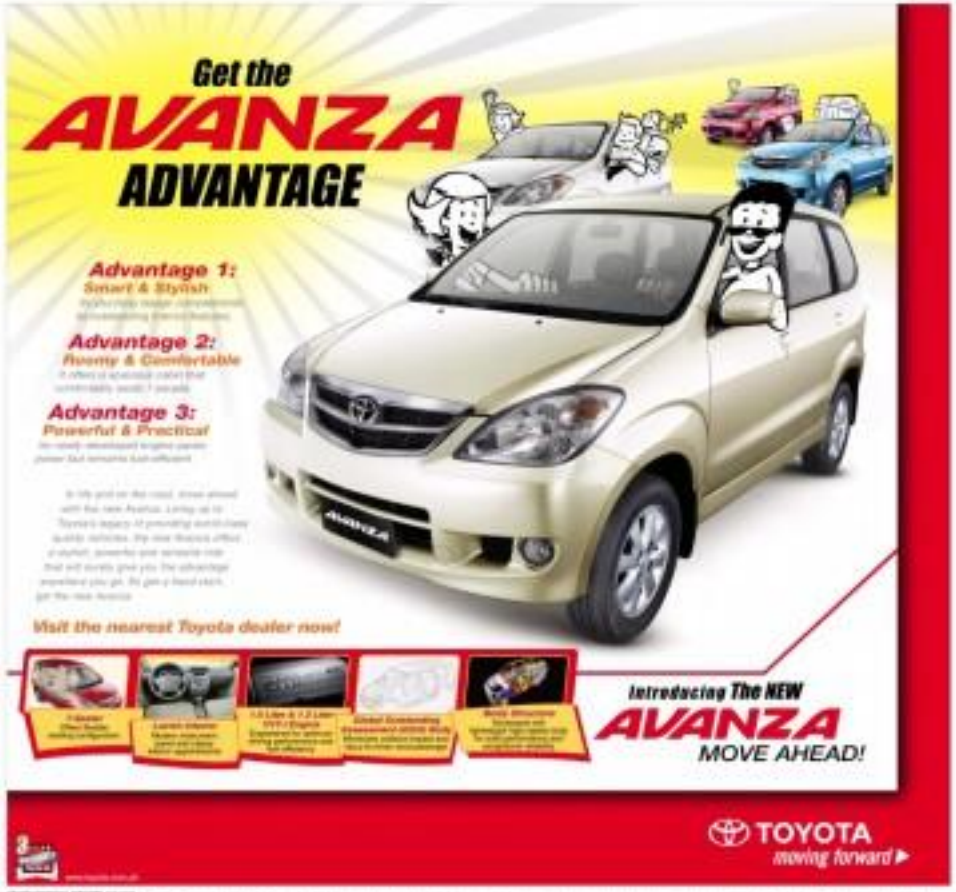
Zero more market reports on Page B2

Shares close lower

SHARE PRICES CLOSED 0.11-PERCENT lower yesterday on consolidation ahead of the Christmas holidays, with investors keeping to the sidelines despite a regional rebound, dealers said.

Thailand's surprise move imposing foreign currency controls dimmed investors'

SHARES B4



Listed firms' net income up 32.5%

Combined profit hit P167.9B as of September

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE COMBINED INCOME OF companies listed on the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) surged 32.5 percent to P167.9 billion in the first nine months of 2006, from P126.74 billion a year ago, the PSE said in a statement yesterday.

PSE president Francis Lim said that the growth in nine-month earnings exceeded the 27.35 percent hike in net income recorded by the listed firms during the first half of the year.

The new study was based on the consolidated financial statements of 232 listed domestic companies that submitted the reports to the PSE as of Dec. 14, 2006.

"The latest increase in the combined income of the listed companies reaffirms perceptions that the economy stands on solid ground, despite the challenging political environment here and abroad," Lim said.

"This goes to show that despite what's happening to our fellow neighbors, our listed firms are doing very well with the government's efforts to rein in the budget deficit and keep interest rates low," Lim also said.

PSE SAYS listed firms performing well as bank of growing economy

Local stock prices on Tuesday shed 28 points and another 20.14 points yesterday to 2,809.57.

In Thailand, stock prices fell 108 points after the Bank of Thailand imposed a new rule that discouraged foreign investors from bringing in Thailand short-term foreign exchange capital, in order to arrest the surge in the Thai baht.

Thailand later dropped the plan.

Lim observed, however, that for the same period from January to September this year, stock prices—as tracked by the Philippine Stock Exchange Index (PSEi)—advanced 21 percent to 2,556.71 points from 2,098.64 at the close of 2005.

The combined gross revenues of the listed companies from January to September were up 12.7% percent to P1.5 trillion from P1.33 trillion a year earlier.

All six industry groups or the main board, as well as the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) board, enjoyed higher net income and gross revenues this year.

"All six sectors recorded a double-digit growth in income and revenues, while those on the (SME board enjoyed a 112 percent hike in combined income," Lim said.

Firms on the SME board chalked up the best growth in net profit after recording the P1.26 billion in losses they incurred for the first nine months of last year, by replacing this with a P6.6-billion net income for the same period this year.

The total gross revenues of firms on the SME board went up 66 percent to P122.13 million.

Outside the SME board, the mining and oil sector recorded the highest growth in income at 61.6 percent, as combined net earnings of companies in the sector reached P5.54 billion from P3.38 billion a year ago.

Listed companies in the services sector accounted for the biggest share of gross revenues at P218.3 billion, or 8.8 percent higher than the year-ago level of P200.81 billion.

Net earnings of firms in the holding firms' services sector up 56 percent to P30.7 billion; those in the industrial sector rose by 26.6 percent to P84.9 billion; the financial sector by 20.5 percent to P20.89 billion, and property sector by 19 percent to P9.21 billion.

The combined earnings of companies that make up the Mcompany PSEi went up 22.4 percent to P114.6 billion from P93.62 billion the previous year. But the share of the PSEi firms to the total income of all listed companies shrank to 68.6 percent from 73.3 percent.

Nonoc mine talks hit snag over ownership

PLANS TO REOPEN THE NONOC NICKEL mine in the Philippines by 2008 might be delayed as talks between Chinese investors and the mine owner are deadlocked over sharing ownership, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

Jinchuan, which operates China's largest nickel mine, and the Hanwei Group, China's biggest steel firm, agreed in April 2005 to invest at least $1 billion to revive the Nonoc mine, which has the capacity to produce 45,000 tons of nickel a year.

But since then, there has been little progress in talks with the mine's owner, Philnico Industrial Corp.

"There is a big divergence in their bargaining position," Socrates Planning Secretary Romulo Neri said in a briefing.

"Debt settlement is one of the more problematic issues, but the government is willing to bend over backward to get Jinchuan to agree, but Philnico is asking for more and more concessions," he added.

The government wants to re-open the Nonoc nickel mine as part of plans to revive the country's once lucrative minerals sector, which would boost economic growth and improve exports.

In July, Jinchuan said it had signed a deal secured with the Philippine government and Nonoc mine owner Philnico.

Philnico has sought to settle some $300 million of debts stemming from the mine's closure, which the company brought before Mining from the government.

Dominic Sarmiar, chairman of Philnico, told Reuters the government was trying to mediate so that both parties reconcile their differences.

"The mine is not valuation. After four years of doing due diligence work, they (Jinchuan) said they wanted to do a feasibility study that will be completed in May 2007," Narmiar said.

Shell IPO plans hang

By Abigail L. Ho

PILIPINAS SHELL PETROLEUM CORP.'s decision to list on the Philippine Stock Exchange will hinge on the final results of its study on whether to keep its refinery here.

"The company's (initial public offering) is linked with our refinery expansion study. If we do any, we'll have to comply with the law," Shell country chair Edgar Chua said yesterday.

Section 22 of RA 8479, or the Downstream Oil Industry Deregulation Act, mandates oil refiners to list at least 30 percent of their common stock or its local branch within three years of the effectivity of the law.

This timeframe had been pushed back due to the bearish market in the past five years.

But PSE president Francis Lim said in an earlier briefing that this argument no longer holds true, judging from the local bourse's performance in recent months.

Shell is expected to come up with a final decision within the first quarter of 2007.

In an earlier interview, Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said officials from Shell parent firm Royal Dutch Shell Plc. indicated that the local investment climate would be a big factor in determining to remain a refiner or just be a pure importer.

ALI to develop Dela Rosa lot

AYALA LAND INC. has signed an agreement with two partners to jointly develop a more than 40,000-square-meter lot on Dela Rosa Street in Makati into an office building for the fast-growing business process outsourcing (BPO) sector.

Ayalaland said this was the largest BPO building that ALI would undertake in terms of leasable space.

ALI's partners in the project are MLT Investment Ltd. and Filipinas Investments Ltd.

ALI, MLT and Filipinas Investments are in the process of incorporating a joint-venture company, which will develop the BPO building.

The joint-venture company will be 36 percent owned by ALI, with the balance of 64 percent split evenly between MLT and Filipinas Investments.

MLT Investments Ltd. is an investment arm of Goldman Sachs, a leading global investment banking, securities and investment management firm that provides a wide range of services worldwide to a substantial and diversified clientbase.

Clients include corporations, financial institutions, governments and high net worth individuals.

On the other hand, Filipinas Investments Ltd. is an affiliate of Cognizant Asia, the Asian operations of Cognizant Financial Group Inc., which is a boutique investment firm (Cognizant Asia, Investments, USA. Hoovers).

Sanchez

Neda says economy to grow 5.7% in 2007

From page B4

earnings had dwindled over the years.

As of the first nine months of the year, the United States accounted for 18.3 percent of the Philippines' export earnings, followed by Japan with 16.9 percent. Multi-Asean countries in Asean, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore—together accounted for another 16.9 percent of the Philippines' export earnings, while the European Union had an 18.4 percent share.

Neneja Ilkowitsch advised proprietors by some analysts that global demand for electronics, the Philippines' major export product, would subside next year.

The Neda official noted a forecast by California-based Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) that global demand for consumer electronics like DVDs, MP3 players and mobile phones would continue to increase. While the US economy might be headed for a slowdown, demand from other markets like Japan, China and other Asian countries was expected to be.

Aside from exports, other growth drivers for the Philippine economy next year, according to Neda, were higher dollar remittances from overseas Filipino workers, higher investments in real estate, construction and growth of the call center industry and higher government spending for infrastructure.

Shares close lower

From page B1

were seen if the measure was quickly reconsidered after a sharp plunge on the Thai stock market, first said.

The composite index fell 20.14 points to 2,809.57 after trading between 2,824.21 and 2,804.07. Uptrend narrowly beat losers 53 to 51 with 46 stocks unchanged.

Turnover was 2.63 billion shares worth P2.3 billion.

"The market is still consolidating, mainly because of the holidays ahead, while both local and foreign investors said the Thai debacle is an excuse to take further profits," said Ruperto Maniquiz of Regina Capital Development Inc.

Value, despite investments by the (Yangko Ironsteel Philippines) that it would keep a liberal stance on foreign capital inflows and this was not a cause for concern, investors chose to shy away from the market," Maniquiz added.

The BSP said it was not planning to follow the Bank of Thailand's move to impose controls on capital inflows and would continue to maintain a liberal stance on foreign capital.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (TEL) rose P2.50 while Globe Telecom Inc. (GLO) fell P1.50.

Ayala Corp. ventured 95 to P495.

Newer distributor Manila Electric Co.'s A shares, reserved to Filipinos, declined 50 centavos to P9.6 while its B shares, open to foreign investors, dropped a peso to P9.

Food and beverage giant San Miguel Corp.'s A shares rose 50 centavos to P67 while its B shares edged up P1.50 to P73.50. AFP

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Baht bungle tarnishes Thai economic czar

BANGKOK—HE HAS BEEN LEE THAILAND'S central bank, Philippines President was highly regarded as a fierce defender of the baht's independence while fending finance ministers at bay.

Now, that reputation appears to rest on after a bungled bid to rein in a surging baht triggered the biggest stock sell-off in 10 years and shattered the confidence of Thailand's economic leadership.

"There was nothing no matter better the case, its gives Philippines a make bearing," said Andrew Sim, head of Thailand Research for Citicorp Securities in Bangkok.

Prithiyahnon assumed the role of finance minister and economic czar after a bloodless coup in September ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

After five years as head of the bank of Thailand, he was considered a safe pair of hands as the economic lifter while the economically illiterate coup leaders focused on politics.

In his old job, Prithiyahnon was considered responsible for resisting political pressure and becoming one of the region's most hawkish central bankers with an aggressive series of interest rate rises to tame inflation.

But on Tuesday the new finance minister went on television to announce a partial reversal of the baht restrictions imposed by his successor. Tarisa Watanagase, a 30-year bank veteran who has been in her new job by two months.

"A reason has been learned, but no one needs to be responsible for this," Prithiyahnon said after the market plunged nearly 15 percent, its sharpest one-day fall in 10 years.

But Prithiyahnon's failure to forestall the chaos wrought by the controls has put his political future on the line, investors and Thai newspapers said.

"Can he survive what other politicians normally wouldn't after a one-day stock market collapse of almost 20 percent?," the Nation newspaper asked in a commentary.

"His enemies are now picking up their knives."

Born to an aristocratic family in 1947, Prithiyahnon's background presents him the former's title "Mom Rachawong" reserved for royal descendants.

He obtained an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and was a top executive at a major Thai bank in the 1970s and 1980s.

Years after joining the bank of Thailand, he shocked financial markets by announcing a 100 basis point rise in interest rates.

He later rolled it back by 25 basis points in an abrupt reversal that left investors scratching their heads.

Tuesday's policy U-turn came after Prithiyahnon's boss had warned the central bank's announcement on Monday that it would be a "historic" move to crush the baht. *Reuters*

Asian stocks recover as Thailand backs down on currency controls

HONG KONG—ASIAN STOCKS yesterday bounced back from sharp falls after Thailand's military government backed down on imposing harsh currency controls which saw Bangkok shares lose a massive 15 percent.

The flip-flop and a mostly performance on Wall Street overnight had investors clearing bargains following Tuesday's sell-off amid fears in Thailand and echoes of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

"The market is up on a recovery from yesterday's shock," said Gabriel Yap, a dealing director with Phillip Securities in Singapore. "It's not something that will have a systemic or hold over the market."

Late Tuesday Thai Finance Minister Prithiyahnon Devakula was forced into an embarrassing policy U-turn after an unprecedented 23 billion dollars were wiped off the value of Thai listed companies in one day.

The rout was triggered after the military-backed government imposed capital controls in an effort to check the increasing pressure a rising currency was causing exporters, a key driver for the economy.

The positive measures is practice stopped foreign fund inflows dead into a market where they had been very important until Prithiyahnon, formerly a central bank governor, declared an exemption on stock investment.

In Bangkok...where foreign investors account for about 40 percent of the market, the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) responded immediately and was up 10.64 percent in early trade, with benchmarks elsewhere following suit.

"With the change, foreign investors can continue to invest in the Thai stock market. Sentiment is really positive," said Jirki Tikhamdhal, a senior market analyst at Siam City Securities.

However, investors remain less than impressed with the government's policy was initiated through a bloodless coup in September that ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a former telecoms tycoon known for his business savvy.

"It really damages the government's credibility. You cannot suddenly change important regulations overnight," said Sukhbir Bhandari of Nomura Securities in Bangkok.

Umapherg Thawatit, a leading Thai business daily, demanded someone should take responsibility for the mess, adding: "It was the most expensive economic lesson for Thailand [since the financial crisis in 1997."

Around the region, the reaction was one of relief among Thailand's closest neighbours. Singapore was up 2.39 percent, Kuala Lumpur gained 0.98 percent, Jakarta rose 1.05 percent while Manilla opened up 0.64 percent.

In early afternoon trade, Hong Kong was 1.41 percent higher while Seoul closed up 1.62 percent, with dealers easing the impact from the Thai debacle on local equities had fizzled out.

The capital controls were reminiscent of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis when currencies borrowings in US dollars coupled with high interest rates forced the Thai government to float the currency.

The baht then promptly collapsed along with the economy and the contagion spread across the region. Currencies and stock markets lulled as businesses went bankrupt and economies followed, with governments frantic to shore-up investor confidence.

Central bankers and governments played down suggestions that their countries might follow Bangkok's latest lead and ruled out any repeat of the havoc that engulfed East Asia in the late 1990s.

Harry Su, head of research at BNP Paribas said from Jakarta the knee-jerk reaction in the controls on Tuesday was large, because of the spectre of the financial crisis in 1997 and 1998.

"Indonesia is closer to Thailand and the local market has been one of the best performing markets in the year-to-date," he said. "The Thai government has basically scaled back part of its policy so that is positive for the markets."

Elsewhere, benchmarks steadied to follow lead factors standing in Tokyo closing up 1.40 percent and above the critical 17,000 points mark while Sydney and Wellington registered solid gains to close at record highs. *AFP*

A Thai investor monitors stock prices at a private stock trading floor in Bangkok on Wednesday. Thailand's stock market opened nearly 9 percent higher Wednesday, recovering from a historic fall that shook regional markets and sparked concerns over another Asian financial crisis.

Peso, other Asian currencies bounce back

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PESO YESTERDAY RECOVERED from a fall on Tuesday as spillover jitters over Thailand's initiative to temper the baht's strong ascent fizzled out across the regional currency markets.

The peso closed stronger at 49.375 against the US dollar at the Philippine Dealing System, 16.5 centavos higher than the previous day's finish of 49.72 in the PDS trading floor.

The developed after Thailand—the epicenter of the Asian currency turmoil of 1997—...

to control capital flows, saying it would curtail equities investments from a central bank measure aimed at curbing currency speculation. This was after the Thai stock market suffered its worst fall in 10 years.

In the Philippines, the finance ministers looked to gain of to feel following the Bangko Sentral Philippines' swift assurance that it would not replicate Thailand's bold move.

"Actually, we were not ready for monetary officials to be concerned about the value of money pouring in, in so far as we can see, they will openly welcome that which flows from next door," Deutsche Bank strategist Jessie Enriquez said in a recent commentary.

He said one could quickly draw the line as to whether Philippine economic managers were anywhere near thinking of measures to discourage portfolio inflows, also known as "hot money" due to their volatile nature.

On Monday night, the Thai central bank cancelled a strategy to discourage the flow of short-term money in the local financial system. It required 30 percent of nonresident-related foreign exchange sold for baht to be deposited interest-free with the central bank for a year. Those pulling out funds earlier than one year would be refunded only two-thirds of the amount.

"It was only yesterday that nobody wanted to put any money in to Philippine stocks. But foreign capital inflows have indeed grown since then but at $1.6 billion this year, the economy can hardly be described as swimming in dollars," Enriquez said.

He noted that daily stock market turnover averages a mere $50 million, a tenth of how much Thailand was getting.

"This decade's IPO (initial public offering) cycle has had...

Dow Jones at record as Exxon gains; Oracle hurts Nasdaq

NEW YORK—THE DOW JONES industrial average finished on a record high on Tuesday, spurred by a rise in oil prices that boosted shares of Exxon Mobil Corp.

But the Nasdaq fell as technology stocks dropped after disappointing financial results from Internet industry bellwether Oracle Corp.

Investors also discounted a bigger-than-expected jump in November producer prices. The key inflation gauge registered its biggest gain in 22 years and initially sent stocks lower, but investors ultimately decided the PPI report was benign and would not lead the Federal Reserve to alter monetary policy.

"People are positive that growth is fine and inflation is going to be under control," said Bill Hanna, senior trader at John Hancock Funds in Boston.

"Technology is pressured mainly by the negative headlines around earnings by some big technology companies. It's nothing to do with the overall environment."

The Dow Jones industrial average rose 38.68 points, or 0.28 percent, to end at a record 12,471.33. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index advanced 5.07 points, or 0.31 percent, to finish at 1,425.55. But the Nasdaq Composite Index slipped 6.02 points, or 0.23 percent, to close at 2,420.51.

The Dow hit an all-time high of 12,491.83 in intraday trading. Tuesday marked the Dow's 21st record close since the start of October.

Shares of Exxon Mobil shot up 2 percent, or $1.48, to close at $75.09 on the New York Stock Exchange. The stock contributed the most to the gains in both the Dow and the S&P 500. The CBOE Oil Index rose 1.3 percent.

US crude oil for January delivery rose 96 cents, or 1.5 percent, to settle at $63.15 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The rise in oil prices was attributed to comments that US crude inventories fell in the past week due to shipping delays along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

US oil inventory data will be released on Wednesday.

Investment bank Morgan Stanley reported results that topped analysts' estimates and announced it will spin off its Discover credit card unit.

Morgan Stanley's stock was up 1.7 percent, or $1.33, at $81.78 on the NYSE. It ranked among the S&P 500's biggest advancers.

Shares of Oracle were the busiest thing on the Nasdaq 100 after the database software maker reported disappointing sales late on Monday. Oracle shares fell 4.8 percent, or $1 cent, to $17.18.

Its unexpected quarterly loss from electronics retailer Circuit City sparked worries about weak profits during the holiday shopping season. Its shares fell 17.5 percent, or $4.68, to $19.91 on the New York Stock Exchange. Shares of rival Best Buy Co. Inc. fell 1.6 percent, or 79 cents, to $48.33 and the S&P Retail Index was off 0.5 percent.

Investors also were jittery after a swoop-ling in Thai stocks overnight after the government imposed capital controls to rein in its baht currency. The Thai government later withdrew its restrictions on foreign investment in its stock market.

Home builders' shares fell across the board after Hovnanian Enterprises Inc. posted a quarterly loss and gave a weak outlook, sending its stock down nearly 3 percent, or 68 cents, to $34.56.

The Dow Jones US Home Construction Index fell 1.4 percent.

Trading was active on the New York Stock Exchange, where about 1.37 billion shares changed hands, slightly below last year's daily average of 1.43 billion.

The Nasdaq, about 2.04 billion shares were traded, exceeding last year's daily average of 1,909 billion.

Advancing shares beat decliners on the NYSE by a ratio of about 4 to 3, while on the Nasdaq, more than eight stocks fell for every seven that rose. *Reuters*

Bank's entrepreneurship campaign focuses on women

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

THE ODDS OF STUDENTS landing good-paying jobs when they graduate are unfortunately slim.

Data from the Center for Asia Pacific Studies showed that of the 188 children who enroll in first grade, only 14 will earn college degrees. And only one in 16 of the graduates will get employed.

There is, however, an alternative to scrambling for the few available jobs, and that is to become an entrepreneurs.

This is the message that DE Money Bank, the country's financial services unit of General Electric Co., wants to impart to female college students through its Women Entrepreneurship Program in partnership with the Let's Go Foundation.

"We are committed to helping numbers job seekers into job creators through entrepreneurial education," GEMB Money CEO Glen Kim said in a statement. "Let's Go identified an opportunity for us to bring an important education and investment solution to an important issue in the Philippines."

Let's Go is a nonprofit, nonstock organization that advocates entrepreneurship through education. It conducts research, curriculum development, training of teachers and promotion of entrepreneurship.

CORPORATE CITIZEN

The Women Entrepreneurship Program was launched early this month and the first phase of the program involves generating baseline data on the state of entrepreneurship among women today, as well as their needs and aspirations.

GE Money assistant vice president for communications Iris Mendiluza said the study was expected to be completed in January next year.

The results would then be used as basis for developing a curriculum oriented on entrepreneurship to be used in women's colleges, such as Assumption College, St. Scholastica's College and Miriam College.

The objective is to encourage the students to look at entrepreneurship as a real option when they graduate.

Instead of looking for jobs, they can create jobs, said Mendiluza.

Focus on women

Mendiluza added that GE Money expected to start training the teachers on the new curriculum as soon as the school year ends next year and, hopefully, to begin teaching entrepreneurship to women's colleges by school year 2007-2008.

GE Money focuses on women because of their growing interest in participating in business.

Statistics indicate an increasing growth in the number of women in small, medium enterprises. Because they are growing, are keen to improve the quality and thus increase the contribution of women enterprises economy," said Ivy Bernardo, founder of Let's Go Foundation in a statement.

To inspire the students, GE Money and Let's Go will also hold the Search for Inspiring Young Women Entrepreneurs, as well as a website on and for women entrepreneurs to nurture continuous learning.

Mendiluza said the Women Entrepreneurship Program was just the first of many projects that GE Money hoped to get involved in as it grows its business in the Philippines.

"We went into entrepreneurship because it is aligned with GE Money's operations, and we believe that the financial empowerment of women is a sustainable project," Mendiluza said.

GE Money and Let's Go believe that through this program, they would be able to help ensure the success of women entrepreneurship in the Philippines.

GE MONEY: Bank officials discuss business concepts with Miriam College students

BIR says 2006 target unrealistic, wants it lowered to ₱601.4B

By Michelle V. Ramos

STILL BUSINESS BY A HUGE SHORTFALL as of November, the Bureau of Internal Revenue insisted that its tax collection target for 2006 should be slashed by more than 10 percent to only P601.4 billion.

The national government has set an official target of P675.4 billion for the BIR, or 20 percent higher than its previous year's collection, to help achieve the budget deficit reduction goal.

As of end-November, the BIR was off track to full-year goal. Tax collection was for only P504.1 billion, or P127 billion lower than the P631 billion official target for the 11-month period.

The January-to-November collection figure already includes the P50 billion paid earlier this year by the government's declining but ever-negative asset-caused by accumulated fiscal conduct.

In a mid-November, the BIR was off track to full-year goal. Tax collection was for only P504.1 billion, or P127 billion lower than the P631 billion official target for the 11-month period.

The January-to-November collection figure already includes the P50 billion paid earlier this year by the government's declining but ever-negative asset-caused by accumulated fiscal conduct.

The National Revenue Commissioner Jose Mario Buñag said the target was set based on certain macro-economic assumptions that did not materialize. But he said he should therefore be made flexible with changes in the macro-economic figures.

He noted that of the full-year tax collection goal, P49 billion was assumed to be taxes on government securities. Buñag said this should not be part of the BIR's target because it has no control over the volume of treasury bills and bonds issued by the government.

Buñag said the lower-than-expected issuance of government securities was one of the reasons the BIR was having difficulty meeting its revenue collection goals. The cancellation of some auctions for government securities was due to the government's declining borrowing requirement caused by accumulated fiscal conduct.

The BIR chief also said that P25 billion of the revenue agency's P675.4 billion target was based on a certain assumed volume of production by oil companies. Oil producers are supposed the value-added tax and excise tax.

But Buñag said domestic oil production had been lower than expected partly because Galoc decided to close its refinery in the Philippines and instead import its oil requirements. The P25-billion revenue target from oil should therefore be transferred to the Bureau of Customs, which collects duties from imports, Buñag said.

By deducting the P49 billion in expected tax collection from government securities and the P25 billion from oil production, Buñag said, then the BIR's full-year tax collection goal should only be P601.4 billion.

"This (P601.4 billion) should be our true and fair goal," he said.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves agreed that the shortfall arising from the lower-than-expected government securities issuances was understandable and that the BIR should not be held accountable for it.

But Teves noted that the BIR's usual shortfall was not solely due to lower release of government securities issued. He said the P127 billion shortfall in January to November, only P31 billion was attributable to treasury bills and bonds, while the bigger amount of P100 billion was due to the BIR's own operations.

Another official from the Department of Finance, head agency of the BIR, said lowering the assumed tax collection from government securities from the BIR's usual target would not be justified.

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FirstPac closer to raising PLDT stake

By Ros T. Delmundo

HONG KONG-BASED FIRST PACIFIC CO. LTD. is closer to strengthening its hold on telecommunications giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) as the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) formally tendered 111,143 indirect PLDT shares from the government-owned Philippine Telecommunications Investment Corp. (PTIC).

The Supreme Court in January this year ruled that the PTIC shares should be transferred to the government for being part of the ill-gotten Marcos wealth.

After 20 long years of legal battle from the Sandiganbayan to the Court of Appeals and on to the Supreme Court, the PCGG has finally wrested these shares, which will be sold for the public good," PCGG chair Ricardo M. Abenda said in a briefing.

The government has offered to sell the PTIC shares, which are valued at between P20 billion and P30 billion, through a public auction. The shares correspond to a 6.4-percent stake in PLDT.

Singaporean hedge fund Farallon Warren Hazel (FHH) submitted the highest bid of P20.2 billion for the government's PTIC shares. The offer was equivalent to P2,100/s shares of PLDT held by PTIC. This was lower than the closing price of P2,149/s on Dec. 15.

First Pacific, which has the right to match offers for the shares, has vowed to equal the Farallon bid in a joint bid with Japan's telecom giant NTT DoCoMo, which has a 23-percent stake in PLDT.

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Education crisis seen ...

From page B1

years to 12 years ... a controversial proposal that has been met with bouts of protest from certain sectors in the past.

"In the coming years, the impact of the crisis will be at hand," PBEd executive director Cha-o B. Salazar said during a press briefing. "By then, we will have students graduating from grade school and high school.

PBEd brings together several business organizations, business-based advocacy groups, corporations and individuals with the aim of reforming the education system.

The group is the business community's response to the need for extensive and sustained advocacy in education reform, Salazar said.

The first component of the agenda called for the business sector to advocate reforms that will make every school continuously perform better; get all teachers to continuously improve their teaching practices; adopt a 12-year cycle for formal basic education; oversee the enrichment of curriculum development in the context of policies of new framework of literacy; and to provide public funding for the country-wide attainment of goals.

Salazar, who also heads Ateneo de Manila University, said there would be at least five years before improvements in the education system manifest themselves, given that the reform measures would start immediately.

Earlier, the group warned that the poor quality of education many Filipinos receive would eventually erode the abilities and skills of local workers.

This, in turn, would sap the competitiveness of local businesses in an increasingly globalized and competitive world.

"What is very important for us as a country because people are our number one resource," Salazar said, explaining that the country has managed to transform itself into a service-oriented economy in recent years.

This early, however, the group's push for lengthening the education cycle has already received a lukewarm response from education authorities.

In particular, Education Secretary Jesli Lapus expressed hesitation over the plan to add two more years to the country's basic education curriculum.

"I want to look more at the per school level because the higher dropout rates come from grades one to three," he said in an interview explaining that he was biased toward trying to solve the problem before the middle school and high school years.

The school-to-school study that the education secretary's problem was primarily one of a lack of resources instead of simply a misdistribution of resources.

PBEd, on the other hand, believes that there was a need to both increase the resources made available to the education sector as well as to help them allocate those resources more efficiently.

"Our neighbors in the Asean spend 20 percent of their budget on education while we al-

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LIFESTYLE
John Chua-Sanad Formoso

Fun Christmas baking

The gingerbread cookie has become as much a symbol of the yuletide season as the tree and Santa

Step by Step

Text by Yasmin Baga-Reyes
Photos by Roger Carpio

NO OTHER COOKIE IS AS symbolic of Christmas as the gingerbread man.

It is said the cookie dates back to the Middle Ages. Fair ladies reportedly presented the rather hard, honey-spice bread as a favor to dashing knights competing in tournaments. In those days, gingerbread was tenderly shaped and decorated, sometimes with gold leaf.

Today, gingerbread can be a dense, ginger-spiced cookie flavored with molasses or honey and cut into fanciful shapes, such as the popular gingerbread man. Or, particularly in the United States, it can be a dark, moist cake flavored with molasses, ginger and other spices.

French Baker's Alsatia Inn, a shining father of three Clement, Clement and Juliet, demonstrates the easiest way to make these mini holiday cookies so you can add the traditional Christmas symbol to your holiday celebration.

"Though there are many variations on the

CHRISTMAS C4

PREHEAT oven to 160°C. Using an electric mixer, beat together in low speed flour, baking soda, salt and cinnamon.

COVER bowl with a towel to avoid spill while mixing.

STIR in butter then mix until mixture resembles fine crumbs. Add sugar, syrup and eggyolk.

REMOVE dough from bowl. Knead dough lightly.

WRAP dough in plastic cling wrap. Chill for 30 mins to 1 hour. Meanwhile, make the royal icing. Using a wire whip, combine in a mixing bowl egg whites and powder sugar until well-mixed. Add a few drops of red, yellow or green food coloring. Deposit in a piping bag with piping tip with small round hole. Set aside.

REMOVE dough from chiller. Roll out dough to ¼-inch thickness.

COUNTRY COOKING
Micky Fenix

Filipino culinary inventions

MY INDONESIAN FRIEND, SHONA BERKER Hidden, was asked if there was such a thing as Java rice and Java forks. She was amused.

Since she comes from Java (she pronounces it Jowa), she knows definitely that there is no such thing as rice made lovingly orange with either achuete or kulubing. And Indonesians don't people from her country use blackened, charred meat on bamboo skewers.

So where did *sate babi* and Java rice come from? Myrna Segismundo was asked that when she went on television to promote the Indonesian food festival, with Shona as featured cook, at Restaurant 9501.

Myrna, who appeared as her own announcer/host, it was what she and her production remembered eating at this Super family restaurant founded when Rizal Boulevard was still called Dewey.

But the generation before Myrna's remembers Café Indonesia in the Jasmin Mahler Arcade. Conrado Calalang (of Barrameda and Swanson renaissance) told me that the restaurant was where he brought his dates because, with his allowance, he could afford the Java rice and sate babi, the cheapest items.

This was confirmed by Jocelyn Gamboa Fernandez of the book "Malate" (Booklyn, 2003). "Over Alhambra served Indonesian food, which soon became part of our vocabulary... When funds dipped, the manager, most allowed half-orders, two sticks of sate, a scoop of lemonade rice and sauce, endless lovelihabla."

No such thing

Rijsttafel is now called Indonesian by my sons' generation. They marvel this Filipino-invasive cuisine ending when one of them asked me, "Why is it that anything with pineapple is automatically Hawaiian?" He was thinking of the Hawaiian pizza he just saw in the menu. He found, who is from the "Isa is mac," told him there's no such thing.

I can only guess that it had something to do with pineapple plantations in Hawaii. But it must also have been a Filipino who opened that pineapple can to make some concoction and read that the fruit was grown and canned in Hawaii, thereafter naming whatever he was cooking a Hawaiian-something.

Guessing is hardly research but it really must has, and, like Shonen said, these to mentions have become part of the vocabulary.

Generations ago, someone named the Spanish sausage we love to cook with as chorizo Bilbao. Then someone decided to call the spring roll of ground pork as lumpiang Shanghai. Another person baptized fish noodle dish pancit Canton.

The old joke of people who regarded generations ago was about trying to find such terms in the places mentioned. The punch line: There's no such thing.

The Christmas season has made me think of guess de dish, another name that can't be found in anyone else's dictionary but ours. It's easy to see why Filipinos have given this relatively lowest to Thailand's nine name— it all seems to round in shape.

I liked the old packaging better when the cheese was placed in a round tin can. And the queso de bola of long ago also tasted so much better because it took a long time for the cheese to be transported. So, by the time it arrived here, it had matured. Today, the queso de bola is still soft and moist, a far cry from my late's queso de bola, which had a drier, sharper taste.

Two foreign dishes have also become Filipinized.

French 'import'

One is *ensaymada*, a Filipino dessert with a French name, and it has so far pronounced the Filipino way as you would be understood in the pastry shop.

Nona Enca in "A Culinary Life" (Anvil Publishing, 1992) stumbled it must have been introduced here by Filipino students who studied in the Ecole de Cordon Bleu in Paris because she uses a recipe for cuisine aux Rival in the school's cookbook dated 1895.

She also writes that when she introduced the dessert at her Bon Ton Restaurant in Berkeley 1974, she called it Queen Mirella.

Before Tita Maria included queso meal recipes in her book "The Governor General's Kitchen" (Anvil Publishing, 2006) that were very back to the 1850s. One version is from "Originales de Pedro Carrera de Marcelo" written in Spanish. The other is from an article in The Sunday Tribune Magazine (July 2, 1933) and was from the cake collection of the confectionary store called La Perla. The recipes used either almonds, cashew or pili.

Today, Jill Sandoval makes pistachio sans rival Gallus, call 7217611 during office hours).

The other Filipinized foreign food is spaghetti. Mention the word and what comes to mind are spaghetti strands—or sp as they're easier to handle, the sauce red-dish with a tit of meat and a sprinkling of grated cheese.

Now the meat may be chopped but dog, the sauce may be ketchup and the grated cheese may be Quickmelt. But spaghetti cal-as called *se-ga-get-ti* will always mean that noodle dish cooked beyond al dente with the essential sauce.

Every generation adds to the Filipino culinary vocabulary. A most contemporary one should be *dar pinches*, the name itself ac-curately pictured by those who first introduced it.

It's really food piglet and the name is a contraction of the Filipino words that describe what it is—*guinitang lechon*. It hereafter, from the Petang-Dash idea of placing lechon slices into pancakes served with dif-ferent sauces.

Can you think up of more?

E-mail the author at pinaybuddi@yahoo.com

SANS RIVAL

THE CONSUMER

Kids' health is not to be toyed with

By Linda D. Bolido

FOR THE "STRUGGLERS" out there who still have to complete their shopping for gifts, particularly if there are kids on their list, here is a reminder from the Consumers Coalition that is good to keep in mind not just this holiday season but the whole year round.

After all, gift-giving, especially for children, is not restricted to Christmas. There are birthdays and graduations, Halloween and a few other events when kids expect presents.

Personally, I would suggest educational materials, especially books, if kids are not fussy to read. But if you must, if you have to, get toys, please heed Consumer's advice.

The coalition says, in buying toys, the safety of the children should be paramount. Make sure that no sharp edges and points that can cause lacerations, contusion and abrasions.

Lacking local statistics, the coalition cited a report from the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) indicating that 202,500 toy-related injuries were treated in American hospital emergency rooms in 2005.

The same report found 20 toy-related deaths in the same year, involving children under 15 years, 10 of the fatalities, nine died due to choking. Others were drowned, struck, strangled, asphyxiated, or electrocuted while playing with toys.

The coalition reported that the European Parliament last year banned phthalates, toxic chemicals used to soften polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic.

Children can ingest phthalates when sucking on toys or baby items made with PVC. The chemicals are suspected to cause cancer and kidney damage and interfere with hormonal and reproductive development.

Consumer said, "Though not all plastic toys can [be] marked, those with number '3' inside the recycling symbol are made of PVC plastic and should be avoided."

Helpful tips

The coalition offers the following suggestions when buying toys or gifts:

1. Choose toys that match the age, interest, aptitude, and skill of the recipient. Avoid inappropriate toys that may pose hazards to younger children.

2. Check the warning labels and instructions, particularly the age and safety recommendations. They should be readily understandable to you, and to the child, if he/she is already old enough.

3. Examine the label to make sure that the toy does not contain toxic chemicals such as lead, PVC and other substances that may have adverse health effects.

4. Avoid toys with small parts. Toys that are easily ball up and get swallowed, posing the risk of choking. Look for sturdy toys made of nontoxic, child-safe materials.

5. Make sure the toy's cords or strings are not too long that they may cause strangulation.

6. Avoid toys with sharp edges and points that can cause lacerations, contusion and abrasions.

7. Avoid inanimately loud toys with no volume control. These can cause hearing impairment.

8. Keep toys and plastic wrappings, from peanuts or paper away from children.

The coalition also urged consumers to report to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Consumer Hotline, 7511888, a toy that they suspect/consider dangerous.

The coalition welcomed the recalling by Greater Pendleton Mommy Villar of the "Toy Safety Labeling Act" that would require toy packaging labels to type. It will require toy makers to provide product safety label as well as product information that will show if any of the materials used in manufacturing the toys may be toxic, corrosive, irritant, flammable, or combustible."

E-mail bolidolinda@yahoo.com.ph

SAVORY JAPANESE DELIGHTS

Kimpura Japanese Restaurant presents its new Savory Delights Dishes consisting of kaki-age (tapa-tapa) roll-meals, unagi (eel) tempura, unyaku-ruby (wild ground pork sauce), crunchy-ebi maki, sushi (rice enarbi) bolo ura and tonkatsu shake (scallops and salmon) wasabi. Kimpura also offers an menu from P1,050+ to P1,950+ inclusive of appetizers, soup, main courses and desserts. Call 8924456, 8926274, 723 488 16 and 723 0869.

HEAVEN and Eggs' new chef/man the Grilled Sauce, Peter Apsay, introduces new dishes like Omelette, Chicken Chinglaloya (chicken omelet in tortilla wrap served with mashed potatoes), Brown Eggs and Ham. Visit branches in Ok8 Building, Teresa Manila, QC (tel. 7262670); G/F Gaisano Cebu, 8 (8127912); Fuente Circle in Bacolod City (tel. 9121172); and Market! Market! (tel. 8800976).

PEKING GARDEN offers Premium Holiday Set Menu for 12 persons. It includes four kinds of appetizers, Shark's Fin with fish lip and golden mushroom soup, Peking Duck, Baked Prawns in pastry shell with cheese and butter sauce, Crispy Rice Pork Fillet with fruit cocktails and mayonnaise, Braised Sliced Abalones with Vegetables, Deep-fried Pepperoni Crabs, Steamed Supreme Soup and Pork Dumplings, assorted desserts for P 7,388.+. Peking Garden is open on Christmas Day for dinner and lunch, and dinner on New Year's Day. Call 8177886 and 8179861.

DINING OUT

X'mas promos and buffets

CAFE TEZZA Mandarin Hotel offers three holiday breaks for the family, barkada and officemates. Set menus are priced at P900 (4-6 persons), P1,800 (7-8 persons), and P2,200 (9-10 persons). Call 8815544, 8908888, 8150858, 8908915, 8908944 and 8172888.

VILLA PARELLA in Alabang Country Club has unveiled a new menu. Starters include Salad Nicoise (P376), Freshwater Mangga (P88), and Starters (P220). New creations are Rolling Pork (P 650) and Baked Clams (P 195). Villa Parella Bites consists of Tuna Kinilaw, Freshwater Mangga, Grilled Pork Satay, Grilled Tilapia, Chicken Barbecue and Steamed Prawn. Dessert includes Halo-Halo in Buko.

VILLA MILA Seafood and Barbecue Restaurant includes Jumbo Belly Crispy and Pork Barbecue. Also available are the Mixed Grill Selections and The Island Grill Platters. Halo-Halo Mila Inclusions at Shangri La Dining Room, Shangri La Plaza Mall, Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong City (8510278) and Westgate, Filinvest City (7720981 or 7722880).

RED CRAB (2/L, Dome at the Fort, Arca, Mckinley Town Center, tel. 7323888) presents "Grand Holiday Buffet" with local and international dishes like Pineapple Glazed Fernando, Braised Beef Rendang, Wild Tilapia Filet, Langue Bordelaise, Marchand Duck Confit, Roast Honey Pineapple Chicken and all-time favorite crab dishes. Other inclusions are at the Tower Mezzanine, GC (tel. 8146488).

HAPPY TASTE OF JAPAN

Sachi at the Collonade Food Circle in Ayala Center offers this "Bonbon'ishi Steak set and other authentic Japanese dishes at reasonable prices. Its menu is topped off by Wagyu Kobe Beef, Hamo Hors Salad, Tora Ebiyza and Yakitoba, among other Japanese specialties.

CRUSTASIA Asian Crab and Seafood House offers Pan-fried Catfish in Green Curry Sauce and Pineapple Fried Rice. Crustasia is the Position offers the Emperors Grand Buffet Friday-Sunday which includes seafood and crab dishes. A la carte dishes include King Ora Sparrow, Scallops and Beancurd Hot Pot, Pan-fried Catfish with Green Curry Sauce, Stir-fried Beef, Thai Papaya Salad, among others. Visit Rockwell Power Plant Mall. Call 7305431 or 624 2457.

Serenity in a glass

FEELING STRESSED AND ALL worked up? Sit back and relax with a tall glass of Earth & Sky Lemon or Green Iced Tea. Or drop by one of the Earth & Sky sampling booths at your favorite malls and supermarkets and experience what it is to be truly refreshed.

Bottled bamboo flute music play all day. A tea leaves reader parties into your future. For a minimum purchase, you can also have your name written in the tea leaves by a master calligrapher. There are tai chi and yoga demonstrations as well. With purchases of Earth & Sky, you also get a chance to win an extraordinary horses and Nature cruises.

Earth & Sky Lemon Iced Tea is made with natural ingredients, and contains 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of Vitamin C. Since it is extracted from the finest tea leaves, the Lemon Iced Tea is just what it seems—not too sweet, too sour or bitter—just right for your taste buds. It also comes with the healthful antioxidants that tea leaves are known to have.

Aside from its delicious Earth & Sky Green Iced Tea is made from Nature's finest beauty—natural green tea. Now you can enjoy all the health benefits that come with drinking green tea such as antioxidants which help protect the body from free radicals which may accelerate aging and pose an increased risk to developing major diseases. Its green tea doesn't only promote good health, it helps control excessive hunger!

Earth & Sky Lemon Iced Tea is available in 200-g, 300-g and 1-kg packs while Earth & Sky Green Iced Tea comes in 300-g packs at leading supermarkets, groceries, convenience stores and sarisari stores. Both varieties come in low-calorie versions in 45-g packs.

SAMPLING beach-lovers can get a quick dose of relaxation with just a glass of Earth & Sky Iced Tea

TRY your hand at tai chi and learn how to harmonize mind and body.

Lucky pair

FOR SEN. FRANCIS PANGILINAN and his wife, megastar Sharon Cuneta, eating is their family's number one bonding activity.

"We even have a dining table in our bedroom so the kids eat with us," confesses Sharon.

It was thus a no-brainer for Lucky Mo! to ask the couple to endorse their most popular and trusted noodle brand. Besides the popular tunes that Sharon and Kiko already love, Lucky Mo! is also high in Sangkap Pinoy health giving micronutrients.

"As hands-on parents, we're very particular about the quality of food that we give to our kids and that was something we were concerned with Lucky Mo! at first," says Kiko. "But after they explained that its overall nutritional value, we were excited about the new commercial."

The new Lucky Mo! commercial marks the very first time that the senator plays bonding man to his megastar wife, and it allows the couple to show a side of them the public hasn't seen before.

"I was especially excited for Kiko, because I wanted everyone to see his not so serious side," the megastar quips. "As seen in the commercial, he really loves karaoke and he's an ace hahi-hands so many people think. Believe me when I say that he's a lot funnier in person."

Who would have thought that for Sharon and Kiko Pangilinan, love, laughter and feast time is time, a plate of Lucky Mo! Pancit Canton is all it takes to keep their marriage going strong.

YEH years married and still going strong: Sen. Kiko Pangilinan and Sharon Cuneta are new endorsers of Lucky Mo! Pancit Canton

Breads and cakes as gifts

FRAGRANCE RESTAURANT offers freshly baked holiday breads and imported cakes for gift-giving this season.

The Tres Fresh Bread Package lets you choose any two combination for only P250. A box of Tea King bread spiced up with Mixed Fruits and Almond is available for P225. In addition to Bar Pastry Cutter, Italianni's also has cakes imported from the United States, such as the seven-pound New York Cheesecake Colossal, Chocolate Bombe ("Italian"), Strawberry Exclusive Cheesecake, Turtle Cheesecake and the three-layered sponge cake, Tiramisu. Call or visit any Italianni's branch and check out its holiday breads and imported desserts.

HOLIDAY breads and imported cakes great for gift-giving, available at Italianni's.

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Fun Christmas baking

Point page K1

USING cookie cutters, cut out desired shapes.

TRANSFER cookies to tray with greased baking sheet. Bake for 20-30 minutes.

ALLOW cookies to cool then decorate.

gingerbread recipe, this one is the simplest way to get started.

You can add more ginger and cinnamon for spicier cookies, more sugar for sweeter cookies, or more butter or shortening for moister cookies.

"These cookies are also great as Christmas gifts to friends. Just put them in a nice gift box or jar," says Sisa Arbaiz, veteran French Baker since the 2000s—is at the Mall of Asia. "Or, they can be ornaments to your tree or part of your table centerpiece."

You can also bring gingerbread cookies to make a gathering crunch.

After baking, the gingerbread hardens when air-dried. Make a hole at the top of each shape if you want to put a string or ribbon.

You may holiday cookie cutters in the shapes of gingerbread man, candy cane, Christmas tree or socks.

With this recipe, the number of cookies you actually get will depend upon the size of the cut-ters.

Ingredients:
600 g all-purpose flour
4 g baking soda
2 g salt
15 g cinnamon powder
12 g ground ginger
174 g confectioners sugar
197 g unsalted butter
95 g maple syrup
50g egg yolk
Royal Icing:
10 g egg white
100 g powder sugar
A few drops of red, yellow or green food color-ing

For suggestions, e-mail thegal@inquirer.com.ph

GINGERBREAD cookies

Have a Spanish party

IF YOU WANT something different for your Christmas party, get The Casa Armas Catering folks more to help you.

The catering arm of Casa Armas Tapas Bar y Restaurante will bring the taste of Spain to the home or any place.

It offers over 100 dishes like the Cocido, Paso Long Cooke and roast chicken, different paellas, tapas, shortcuts, and other delicacies. Sangria, wines and cheese are also available.

Casa Armas Catering Solutions offers five packages.

Menu A costs P495+ per head, Menu B, P595+ per head, Menu C, P620+ per head, Menu D, P725+ per head, and Menu E, P895+ per head.

Call or visit Casa Armas The Pavilion (G/F The Pavilion, 4288 Arnaiz, Dasmarinas Corner, Makati-ave-ning City, tel. 8873865, 8893870; Casa Armas Greenbelt 2 (3/F Greenbelt 2, Ayala Malls, 7573696, 7573961); and Casa Arias Makati (332 Jupiter St., Makati City, 8937842, 8937860).

Choir 'goes' caroling

THE MANILA CHAMber Choir (MCC) will sing Christmas carols every weekend until Dec. 24 at the lobby of the Ayala Museum.

Organized in 1996, the group performs a wide repertoire of classical, folk and contemporary/secular choral pieces.

The MCC has successfully toured Europe, Asia and the United States and won in top international choral competitions.

The MCC has performed in special events, renowned performances, social functions.

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2006 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

LIFESTYLE

KITCHEN RESCUE
Reggie Aquiras

Kitchen icons are windows to the divine

ICONS ARE TRADITIONAL PRESENTS for Christmas and New Year. It is Greek Orthodox practice to hang kitchen icons on New Year's Eve to signify that the place is dedicated to God and hence, all activities therein are blessed.

Fr. Dennis Ibarz of Don Bosco Tahor House says "icons are windows to the divine, thus the common square ones that depict the paintings of the church, a window for us mortals to converse with the divine. The images are humble and not self-absorbed. When you look at an icon, it almost always looks back at you."

Wanting to help nine young men who, for economic reasons, had stopped their schooling, Fr. Dennis started Project Icon. Still in its infancy, the project is for seniors to donate budget.

Proceeds from the sale of the icons provide scholarships for the boys who also acquire discipline vital to their future through working on the tedious art of icon-graphy.

Fortunately, hard work has paid off. The icons have all been snatched off as soon as they left the oven and Fr. Dennis could only hope that this continues to help more people.

Like a true Salesian, he watches on for a cause, icons in one, hoping that these beautiful pieces of art and what they stand for, continue to bring a brighter future for those who make them, happiness to those who give them and blessings in abundance to those who receive them.

For orders, call 0917-8332573.

Chinese ham

I bought Chinese ham a year ago (Unwrinkle, Echinger, Quinpet). I want to serve it for the holidays. Please give me advice and cooking instructions on how to make the ham look and taste as new. Please include the recipe for syrup for glazing.
MIRARAM ASUNCION

Here are some of my best ham recipes for the season. Primsie, if you follow all these steps, your ham will taste only six months old! Kidding! Happy cooking!

For salty hams such as Chinese ham: Soak overnight in pineapple juice. Make sure it is

"SANGKALAN" kitchen chopping board icons handmade by the boys of Don Bosco Tahor House make nice Christmas gifts

Take a Christmas break! Leave the cooking to Lucky 21

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LOVEBOATS BY ELIZABETH CHEVARLO

ATOMO AND WEBSY BY DINA GABOTEGUIN

DIVINE COMEDY BY STEVEN PANALIGAN

KIKO MACHINE BY FRANCIS ABRERA

HIBIKOSOMOS BY JOYCE TUPAS

TULDOK BY RAFO AND SKELPIT PALAFOX BELEN

BEN BY DANIEL SHELTON

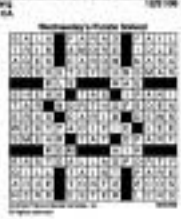
DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Rocks
5 Final Cover letter
10 Pro ___ (in proportion)
14 Big part of show biz
15 Whitewater sailor's challenge
16 Author Chekhov
17 Activity begins
19 Solved puzzle's boast
20 Tear out of Cross Over soap
21 Bottled Spirit
22 Sailor's assistance
24 Sweetpea's stepbrother
25 Honor like Reg
26 Swing's the ability
27 Fall behind
31 Part 2 of quip: "High hand"
32 Lineup on Lombardo's show
33 "Lohengrin" composer
41 Part 3 of quip: "... dance"
44 Edible mushrooms
45 Espionage Committee's foe
47 Environment
51 Office worker
52 End of July
53 Burglar's information
55 Like some Cross Over suits
57 Organic compound
62 Dry Martini in Milan
63 Singer Blake
64 Golfer Norman
65 NCAA part
66 Normal way to jump a vaulter
67 Sacrifice spot

DOWN
1 Governor Perry
2 Boss of KRQ
3 Sale
4 Cellar bar
5 Lowdown

By Mel P. Chichinsky
Huntington Beach, CA

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved



HOROSCOPE

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

		7	5		8	2		
				4				
6				1				9
7								6
	4	9				8	2	
8								5
1				6				7
				2				
		8	3		9	4		

Difficulty Level ★★★

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Answer to previous puzzle

3	4	6	9	2	8	7	1	5
9	2	1	5	7	6	4	3	8
7	5	8	4	1	3	2	6	9
2	6	3	1	9	4	5	8	7
8	1	4	7	3	5	6	9	2
5	9	7	8	6	2	3	4	1
4	3	9	6	5	7	8	2	4
6	8	5	2	4	1	9	7	3
4	7	2	3	8	9	1	5	6

Difficulty Level ★★★

Yuletide confections

PART OF SOME CHOCOLATEY treats for Market Buenos. Try these recipes courtesy of Hershey's.

Christmas Kisses Candies

About 16 Hershey's Kisses Milk Chocolates
¼ c ground almonds
1/3 c powdered sugar
1 tbsp light corn syrup
½ tsp almond extract
Few drops green food color
Few drops red food color
Granulated sugar

Remove wrappers from chocolate pieces. Mix together ground almonds and powdered sugar in medium bowl until well combined.

Stir together corn syrup and almond extract; pour over almond mixture, stirring until completely blended.

Divide mixture in half; placing each half in separate bowl.

Add green food color to one part; with clean hands, mix until color is well blended and mixture clings together. Add red food color to other half; mix as directed.

Shape at least 1 tsp almond mixture around each chocolate piece. Roll in granulated sugar. Store in tight container in cool, dry place.

Makes about 16 candies.

Creamy Chocolate-dipped Strawberries

1½ c Hershey's Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips
1 tbsp shortening (do not use butter, margarine, spread or oil)
Fresh strawberries, rinsed and patted dry

Cover tray with wax paper.

Place chocolate chips and shortening in medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at high (100 percent) for one minute, stir.

If necessary, microwave at high for an additional 15 seconds at a time, stirring after each heating, just until chips are melted when stirred.

Holding strawberry at top, dip bottom two-thirds of each berry into melted mixture; shake gently to remove excess. Place on prepared tray.

Refrigerate about 1 hour or until coating is firm. Cover; refrigerate to store dipped berries. For best results, use within 24 hours.

Makes about three dozen dipped berries (¾ c coating).

Conventional directions: Cover tray with wax paper. Melt chocolate chips and shortening in top of double boiler over hot, not boiling, water; stir until smooth. Remove from heat. Prepare, dip and store berries as directed above.

CREAMY Chocolate-dipped Strawberries

GOING CUCKOO THIS CHRISTMAS

Enjoy the Christmas celebration with the Oishi Christmas Cuckoo bag, the perfect gift to give or receive this season. Each bag contains various tasty Oishi snacks, such as the Cheese Chips, Black Pepper Prawn Crackers, Onion Rings, Ohmy Multi-Grain Snacks, Sun Tea Instant Iced Tea Mix, Potato Crisps, a 2007 pocket calendar and a surprise gift from Oishi. Every Oishi Christmas Cuckoo Bag not only brings fun to the recipient but also a P1 contribution to Operation Smile Philippines, which gives children born with cleft lip and cleft palate conditions the surgical assistance they need. The Oishi Cuckoo Bag is available at all leading supermarkets nationwide.

Kitchen icons . . .

CHEF Jun-jun Tiozon and his Christmas bread

Pine maple: ¼ c each pineapple juice, ketchup, sugar; 1 c maple syrup; ½ c pineapple chunks, chopped; 2 tbsp soy sauce; 2 tsp vinegar; 2 tsp tomato paste.

Roasted apples:
150g butter
100g brown sugar
½ tsp cinnamon
6 apples, unsliced.

Melt butter, add brown sugar. Add apples and cook until golden.

Pineapples:
Slice pineapples and grill on hot grill pan.

Christmas bread

Ruby-chef Jun-Jun Tiozon has an elegant take on the beloved cheese-pimiento sandwich. The bread always tastes like cheese pimiento minus the pimiento. If salt go so well with your buns or easy on the calorie shots.

It's an original by chef Jun-jun who is part of the boys group, 3 friends of young guns and a lady, all packed with guts (yes that's me). But that's areal word I swear.

By now, I just have to let you know that this yummy Christmas bread could be ordered to, like my family, since could enjoy it by Market Buenos. Call 4206300.

A very merry Christmas to all! Enjoy every bite!

E-mail the author at inquirer@inquirer.com.ph

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TAKE IT FROM A CULINARY EXPERT.

With all the appreciation pouring in for the holidays coming, a good front-door refrigerator is a big help.

Sylvia Reynoso Gida says her Panasonic Prem-Fre Refrigerator takes away the burden of defrosting and gives her a little more time to do other things this Christmas.

With her Panasonic, she says she does not have to defrost her freezer regularly, which takes a lot of time and effort. The high-EEF (energy-efficiency) rate also means less power consumption and more savings for her.

Reynoso Gida adds that her Panasonic drawer has ingredients remain fresh, an important factor in preparing great-tasting meals.

The refrigerator is simple to operate and preserves food the right way.

Reynoso Gida says, for her, Panasonic stands for quality, efficiency and durability.

SYLVIA Reynoso Gida

Filling snack for the holidays

GARDENIA OFFERS THIS easy recipe for instant entertaining this holiday season.

Fried Ice Cream

1 (490g) Gardenia Double Delights Ube & Cheese
1 pint vanilla ice cream
Cooking oil for frying
Fried rice cream batter
2/3 cup/s
1 egg
1 tbsp sugar
2 pc/s
1 tbsp butter, melted
Procedure:

1. Trim off each side of Gardenia Double Delights Ube & Cheese. Place a scoop of ice cream in the middle of the bread. Fold the bread forming a triangle. Press the edges using a fork to seal the bread. Place breads in the freezer.

2. For the batter: Mix together all the ingredients until smooth and creamy. Set aside.

3. For the fried ice cream: Dip bread in batter before putting it in hot oil. Fry until lightly brown. Fry breaded ice cream one at a time. Serve immediately. Sprinkle with powdered sugar as is or with chocolate, caramel or strawberry syrup.

X'mas party packages

HAVE ANY OF THE Jollibee Feeling Laughter-Sharing (JFLS) Party Packages for family-or-friends-only celebrations whether at home or in the office.

The Chickenjoy Super Meal A, at P404 per person, includes one piece Chickenjoy, one piece Burger Steak, rice and a choice of Tofu Pie at P98 each; the Chickenjoy Super Meal B has one piece Chickenjoy, two pieces Crispy Chicken Strips, rice and a choice of Tofu pie.

Party organizers can also mix and match for their own packages. Jollibee items like Sandwiches products, Jolly Hotdog, Burgerbreak, Chickenjoy and Tofu Pies. Customized packages are priced P40-P110 each.

For parties with kids, Jollibee has JFLS Jollity Packs with surprise gifts. For P90 each, kids get a Yumburger and juice and for P70 each, they can have rice Burgerbreak meal and juice. The P95-per-person package includes one piece Chickenjoy with rice and juice.

Jollibee is also offering the Christmas Chickenjoy Basket Treat in a basket-of-love design for five pieces of Chickenjoy, three cups of chocolate-coated pastries, three Pasta Bowl Combos, and three soft drinks for P675.

The P429 basket has six pieces of Chickenjoy, three cups of rice, three servings of Jolly Spaghetti and three soft drinks.

The P399 package contains six pieces Chickenjoy, three cups of rice, three "Dine Pies, and three soft drinks.

ENTERTAINMENT

Editor Ernnie G. Velarde

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or visit us at: showbiz.inquirer.net.ph

AT THE FINALE on Saturday, (clockwise from left) Yeng Constantino sings her winning song on an elevated platform; ABS-CBN top execs Charo Santos-Concio and Gabby Lopez; Yeng and Star Folder mgr. with runners-up Jay Ar Kalaw and Bernie Liang; dance coaches Marlon & Shiela in a production number.

Long road to the top

'Grand Star Dreamer' Yeng Constantino is a prolific songwriter

By Bayani San Diego Jr.

JOSEPHINE "YENG" CONSTANTINO's journey to the top, as grand winner of the ABS-CBN reality-talent search "Pinoy Dream Academy," was long and arduous.

She bested 19 other contestants, or scholars as they were known on the show—including fellow members of Hashimara's brave Lit of Bi, Chad Peralta, Bernie Liang, Ian-R Sitoy, Ruby Trinidad and Irish Sukarno—in the grand finals held at the Araneta Coliseum on Saturday.

Accompanied by mom Imom, Yeng took an EL taxi from Montalban, Rizal, to the ABS-CBN studios in Quezon City for the PDA auditions over two months ago.

"I didn't think I would make [the cut]. My sister was bugging [me to audition]. I had asthma," she recalled in an exclusive interview held in her dressing room after the finals.

Hit originals

She used to perform with the Morning Glory band at the River Bistro bar in Marikina before joining the contest. "We did covers of Kitchie Nadal, Barbie Almalbis and Nic Daulo. Some times, I sang my own songs, for they were ignored by the crowd."

Now, Yeng's compositions are heard not just on ABS-CBN TV and radio stations, but everywhere.

At the grand finals, she sang one of them, "Ang Awit," which proved to be her winning piece. Another one, "Umuulan Kapag Umaaraw," is hit while the wire is the 1024 house, and is now the theme song of Ann Javier Reyes' "Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo," Star Cinema's entry in the Metro Manila Film Festival.

Everyone, everywhere

Yeng said she gets inspiration from everyone, everywhere. "My songs are based on my own experiences, as well as those of my [super friends] and family."

"Her edge [over the others] was that she writes her own songs," 1024 director Lauren Dyogi noted.

Filmmaker Jose Javier Reyes, media performance teacher on the show, concurred. "More than the singer, it[s] was significant [a collection] are] the songwriters."

"She can't be boxed in as pop-rock; she can sing and write anything," said voice teacher Moy Ortiz of the singing group The Company.

LEMUEL CU

ABS-CBN's Cory Vidanes and (inset) runner-up Ed Sharpies

METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL

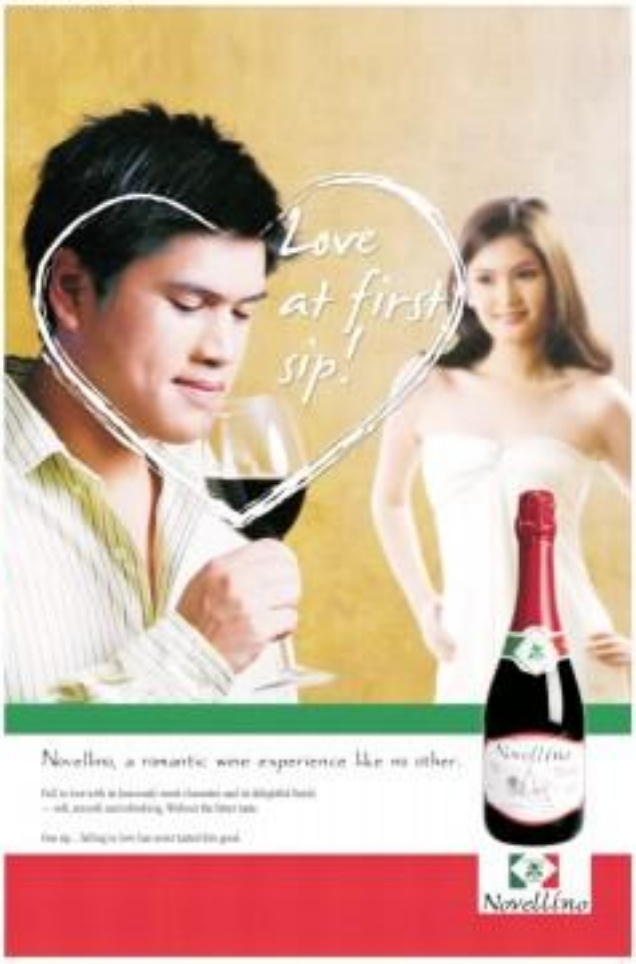
Inquirer Entertainment is running this guide to help moviegoers plan their holiday cinema tour. The MMFF runs from Dec. 25 to Jan. 7, 2007.)

Zazzaa Zaturnnah Ze Moveeh

Shai Zazzaa Padilla, Ruffa Padilla, Pops Fernandez, Alfred Vargas, Chokoleit, Paolene Lazo, Giselle Sanchez, Jay Aleano, Rikki, Klinko de Castro, Jay Wade, Christian Bautista, Ahron Ustiagui

Directed by Joel Lamangan

Based on the same book by Carlo Vergara, this iconic super-heroine caper is billed as Regal's "biggest" movie to date. "It's definitely the most expensive," says executive producer Lily Monteverde. "We hired the production design team of Wood Illusion Quest for special effects, prosthetics and makeup. We flew to make directors and martial-arts experts from Hong Kong and Singapore." Negri pulled out all the stops, producer Noelle Monteverde Tee concedes. "This movie boasts of more than 2,000 visual effects shots. We used the latest CGI software also utilized in Hollywood hits like 'Superman Returns' and 'X-Men.'" This is confirmed by Ignite Media's Dave Hukom. "We aimed for a photo-realistic effect. For the sequence depicting Planet X, there was really no small-special effects." Lead star Zsazsa Padilla is impressed: "The fight scenes with the giant frog and Armageddon were colorful and well-choreographed. It's hard to get bored with this film because it has much for viewers to enjoy, comedy, action and a bit of drama and romance." Perfect for the Christmas season, assures director Joel Lamangan. "It's not just a gay movie; it's for the entire family."



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Watch the box-office biggest blockbuster movies of 2006 once again before the year ends.

Mission Impossible 3	11:00 - 1:05
Silver	11:15 - 3:30
Nu 1 Mey Sau	3:00 - 5:00
Ice Age 2	4:30 - 6:25
Superman Returns	6:35 - 9:10
X-Men 3	9:40 - 11:05

STA. ROSA

LIPA

DASMARINAS

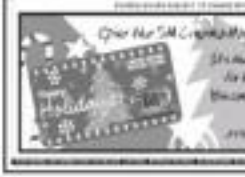
ANGELES

IMUS

STARMILLS

BACOLOD

ILOILO



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MOVIE SCHEDULES/PRICES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

GALLERIA

1 CASINO ROYALE + TAX	5 SPIRIT TRAP
2 HAPPY FEET	7 THE NATIVITY STORY
3 SA ILALIM NG DAGAT	8 REYNA
4 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2	9 BORAT
5 TENACIOUS D	10 KAMA SUTRA 3

ERMITA

1 TENACIOUS D	
2 REYNA THE NATIVITY STORY	5 SPIRIT TRAP
3 HAPPY FEET	6 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
4 CASINO ROYALE	7 KAMA SUTRA 3

METRO EAST

1 REYNA	5 TENACIOUS D
2 HAPPY FEET	6 SPIRIT TRAP
3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2	7 CASINO ROYALE
4 THE NATIVITY STORY	8 KAMA SUTRA

NOVALICHES

1 CASINO ROYALE	3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
2 HAPPY FEET	4 REYNA

CITISQUARE MALABON

PIONEER

1 ANG PAMANA: THE INHERITANCE	1 TENACIOUS D
2 REYNA	2 HAPPY FEET
3 RESERVE	3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
4 RESERVE	4 SPIRIT TRAP

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IMAX

STA. ROSA

1 CARS	1 HAPPY FEET
2 SANTA CLAUSE 3	2 THE RETURN
3 MY FIRST WEDDING	3 THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT 2
4 DEDK THE HALLS	4 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS

DASMARINAS

ANGELES

1 FEAST	1 THE MARINE
2 DARNYARD	2 ZU WARRIORS
3 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS	3 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
4 EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH	4 CARS

IMUS

STARMILLS

1 HAPPY FEET	1 HAPPY FEET
2 DECK THE HALLS	2 MEE-SHEE
3 FEAST	3 REYNA
4 REYNA	4 THE RETURN
	5 FRAGILE
	6 THE MARINE

BACOLOD

ILOILO

1 FRAGILE	1 FRAGILE
2 DARNYARD	2 MEE-SHEE
3 HAPPY FEET	3 HAPPY FEET
4 CASINO ROYALE	4 THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE
5 THE NATIVITY STORY	
6 MEE-SHEE	

The Perfect Gift All Year Round

A Pre Paid Movie Pass to the Hottest Seats in town.

Roundup

DESIREE DEL VALLE

'Full' goes to Sundance

"FULL" A DIGITAL Film production, will be shown at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, which runs Jan. 18 to 28 in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Utah.

The movie is based on a screenplay by Jimmy Orozco, winner of the 1st PBB Scriptwriting Contest. It was directed by Antonio Salles.

It will be screened in the festival's one-of-competition Spectrum Section.

"Full" tells the story of Jimmy, a young girl who copes with the behavior of her disaster father, who encounter the young man in their village.

It stars Diether Ocampo, Carlo Aquino, Iwana Tarsia and Richard Reyes.

'Streetdance Battle 2'

The University of the Philippines (UP) team and Xavier High School emerged as grand champions of "Streetdance Showdown Battle 2."

Both teams received P100,000 in cash.

The event will be shown on STZ tomorrow, 5 p.m. and on Dec. 24, 5 p.m.

First runners-up in Colegio de San Juan de Letran (High School) and Mapua-Makati (College) received P60,000 each, and 2nd runners-up Colegio de Sta. Rosa-Makati (High School) and UP-Manila (College), P40,000.

'Blood Diamond'

Warner Bros.' thriller "Blood Diamond," starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Connelly and Djimon Hounsou, recently won two awards at the National Board of Review—Best Supporting Actor for Hounsou and one of the Ten Best Films of 2006.

Set against the chaos and civil war that enveloped 1990s Sierra Leone, the film tells the story of Danny Archer (DiCaprio), an ex-mercenary from Zimbabwe, and Solomon Vandy (Hounsou), a fisherman.

Both are African, but their histories and circumstances are as different as any can be until their lives become joined in a common quest to recover a rare pink diamond.

The movie opens in local theaters on Jan. 6.

'Star Wars'

"Star Wars...The Complete Saga" airs exclusively on Star Movies every Sunday at 9 p.m.

The episodes will be aired on the following dates: "Attack of the Clones," Dec. 24, "Revenge of the Sith," Dec. 31; "A New Hope," Jan. 7; "The Empire Strikes Back," Jan. 14; and "Return of the Jedi," Jan. 21

Long road to the top

From page E1

Even her fiercest competitors acknowledged that Sing's songwriting ability was her primary asset.

"She's the youngest songwriter I know," said second runner-up Ramon Liang. "She's very talented and her songs inspire the youth." Third runner-up Eng Hi also agreed.

Supelled scholar Ouvey Langit, who was voted by narrow focus as Sing's equal in songwriting, opined that Sing's "sheer talent" was the deciding factor.

A standout

"She stood out from the start. I first noticed her as the kids-off in Orbo last August," outer search of Sweet Plutonids, star of The Computer Q, said of Sing.

In the dressing room, the "Grand Star Dreamer" handed her medal over to dad Jumbles, who proudly wore it as their very home.

"Here, the real Grand Star Dreamer," Sing told her father and stomachest supporter, she said. "Even though I wanted to give up, he kept encouraging me."

Sing, who turned 14 on Dec. 4, said her triumph was a "very, very, very,

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Cinema 2000 Robinsons Galleria
Cinema 2000 Pavilion Mall
Cinema 2000 Greenhills
Cinema 2000 Robinsons Galleria
Cinema 2000 Ayala Center Cinemas
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Aga & Charlene are serious . . .

From page E4

Gretchen Barretto, Rica Peralejo, Angelica Panganiban, Sexie Capri, Tonyo Garcia, Derek Ramsay and Rafael Rosell. Rica is well known at last-nite beer-tackled in the film, in a sexy, lace-trimmed outfit—as a Born-again Christian but made her more attuned to what's right for her. That includes Mr. Right. "I've stopped looking. I just keep praying. I know He will send the right one my way soon." Right on, Rica!

FYI (For Your Indulgence)

I had a blast hanging out with Heather Domingo and Kristine Hermosa backstage during the "Young Fabbbing" launch event. Ate Ehra's BEST foundation. They were both tired with all the preparations but the successful turn out was more than enough compensation, Shel said. The ate wondered first of all the bench opened to purchase for her. Sissi Mills volunteered to sing. He went out of his way to sign. Nice guy. He's just relieved/stressed by many people."

Did you hear his dad at a young age but he enjoys being a surrogate dad to all his "adopted" kids. "Next, ing ko lalay ang dami na ngang gusto ni Tin Tanghal?" Kuha ko you, Shel. Lilwang

E-mail/ sending hello/hangin/kalipa- hoo.com

ENTERTAINMENT

How stars make up for lost time

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

It's often too late to hear their careers back up to their previous level or intensity

ON THE LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT SCENE, the operative verb is: Out of sight, out of mind. That's why stars who go on an extended leave from the biz feel very insecure, and make splashy comebacks as soon as possible. Most of the time, however, it's too late to hear their careers back up to their previous level or intensity.

There are exceptions, of course—like Sharon Cuneta, Vilma Santos and (dare we hope?) Nora Aunor. But a lot depends on the nature, quality and highest of their comeback projects.

For most stars, however, comebacks are decidedly a vertical climb. On the silver screen these days, Gretchen Barretto is poised to make her big comeback, after many years of absence, in the Metro Film hot-story, "Matakot Ka Sa Karma."

This explains why Gretchen has been in the publicity spot these days—promoting her movie, coming up with "honest" and therefore controversial statements, declarations, opinions and revelations, etc.

This has served to relate the public's interest in Gretchen's persona, and hopefully, in her performance in "Karma," enough to make it a should-see at the festival in many people's books.

Unfortunately, Gretchen has also stirred a major tempest with some other stars that has piked her significant other, who has demanded her fans stop giving other stars the stink-eye. Why exchange her playful invitation for the dangerous taste that local show biz often has to be Karma."

AGA AND CHARLENE with their twins Kiana and Andrea

Aga & Charlene are serious but also fun parents

BY LOUCHIE FRIENDLY WITH AGA and Charlene Muhlach seems to my onerous duty. When I had more cue, I don't even have to run to them. They're always right there chumming by me, very much like the theme of their latest Jollibee TV commercial "Coming Home." It features their adorable twins Andrea and Atasha. The ad reminds us that amid the holiday rush, No. 1 on our "Christmas list" list should be our family.

As Aga puts it, "Charlie ga-uso. Sometimes, I wonder if I'm making out recommending. But I'm happy I am staying home with my family. If (Charlene) and I never run out of things to talk about. Plans we have aspirations, we make sure to patch things up right away. Ok ka pasado magpasabi sa akong mo. Bawale ng mahaba-haba ng away. Ang mga bata, bawal ng mawalan ng ama."

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Anne Carvajal

Is he willing to do it? He answer: "Oo, not against it but I will not encourage them. Of course, I'd rather that they finish their studies abroad. I want them to be well-reliant at an early age like me. The future options of Atasha better watch out. I still give them a hard time (laughs)."

Charlene agrees. "Siguro pa lang when Atasha tells him that she has a BF in school, Aga ga-kotse ako nang mga mga Andrea nga ba-bata ay crush na. I get jealous!"

It was such a delight listening to their amusing parenthood anecdotes. (Aga got shocked seeing Atasha in "pandalaga" outfits: "Pinapalitan kong ng mga mahaba!").

The Muhlachs take parenting seriously but they keep it fun. Even on-hour the billboards and TV ads, they are really one jolly family.

Super Ninja

Regal Entertainment's "Super Ninja" is bound to be the newest superhero craze. It's about seven young super heroes whose goals are to retrieve their kidnapped parents and save the world. Yet killed by Amalyn Sheperd, Mark Herras, Polo Ravales, John Prats, Sandara Park, Katrina Halili and the new "kpa"—Andrew Muhlach.

The movie boasts of high-tech computer-animated and visual effects executed by Hollywood-based artists, plus stunts directed by Hong Kong's Philip Kwok. You must stay until after the closing credits to see the director that's slated for "Super Ninja 2."

I asked Jon and Polo what they would change in show biz if they had super powers. Jon said, "I'd erase all the bad elements in the biz. Create a single negative item can hurt one's career." Polo quips, "I'll wipe away the impossibles."

The young stars' different powers in the film and their awesome stunts (Mark's diving in mid-air, Jon's helicopter sequence, Andrew's real punch in the stomach) truly makes them worthy of hero worship.

Santa Richard

Richard Gutierrez played Santa what he threw a Christmas party for the movie press in Imperial Palace Suites. His cute lab Mimi (Tita Annabelle), Baji (with Jon Raymond) and lovable Oh Jun Lalla helped entertain his guests. So, Richard, a already made, he has not lost sight of the people who have paved the way for him.

On top of the lavish raffle prizes he gave away that night, (Cl) Richard's taking him out from his busy holiday schedule to be with the press that cooked him—supposed. Coach him in the ways of "Gay Si Oh," whatever he is—together with Angel Locsin. No wonder his colleagues all hear in him as if saying "Mano Po, 'Chard! You're cupcie the 'darling' department!"

'Matakot Ka Sa Karma'

Camera Video MMFF entry, "Matakot Ka Sa Karma," is a heart-in-your-throat horror trilogy with maximum storytelling, penned and directed by Jose Javier Reyes. It stars